Mentoring for Change: A Time Use Study of Teacher Consultants in Preschool Reform

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Abstract

It is now widely recognized that if teachers are to improve their knowledge and skills, they need ongoing opportunities to try out new ideas within their own classroom contexts and with the help of skilled colleagues. Professional development from this perspective, therefore, not only involves teachers attending training sessions such as workshops or conferences but also receiving on-site technical assistance and mentoring in new instructional techniques. To ensure that preschool teachers receive this kind of training, policy makers in early education have begun to create different types of teacher consultant positions such as mentors and curriculum coaches. This paper reports the findings of a time use study of 35 teacher consultants whose role was to provide curriculum assistance and professional development to preschool teachers in response to a court mandate. Using the retrospective time diary method, the teacher consultants were asked to account for all of their activities in a 24-hour period. On average, teacher consultants worked a 7-hour day, distributing this time primarily among 13 activities. Most of the teacher consultants' time was spent on teacher development activities such as providing classroom assistance, planning, and giving workshops. A factor analysis shows that if teacher consultants spend time in activities connected to working with teachers in classrooms, they are less likely to plan or give workshops to teachers. To ensure that teacher consultants can have their intended impact, policy makers are advised to provide specialized training and limit the number of responsibilities associated with this role.

Introduction

Despite an extensive research base documenting the relationship between qualified teachers, program quality, and children's ongoing academic success (Barnett, 2003), most teachers do not have adequate qualifications to produce the outcomes associated with high-quality programs. In general, higher-quality programs are staffed by teachers with a minimum of a bachelor's degree, who also tend to have more specialized training in child development and the teaching of young children (Whitebook, 2003). Yet, nationally representative studies of the workforce estimate that only 50% of the approximately 284,277 teachers of 3- and 4-year-olds have a bachelor's degree of some kind (Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002). Thus, even if states are instigating efforts that support teachers to upgrade their professional credentials, such as financial assistance to pay for coursework and changes to the minimum preservice training that one needs to work as a teacher, the fact remains that it will take some time for the workforce to be as qualified and well trained as the research base suggests is necessary.

Rather than waiting for teachers to obtain higher qualifications, another way to approach the challenge of improving program quality is to concentrate on enhancing teachers' expertise through professional development. That is, at the same time as teachers might be improving their qualifications, they also receive training in what constitutes high-quality curriculum for young children and how to enact such practices. Traditionally, professional development has often taken the form of workshops, where teachers usually leave their classrooms for a few hours to learn about topics related to their work with young children. However, it is now widely recognized in the school reform literature that if teachers are to improve their knowledge and skills, they need ongoing opportunities to try out new ideas within their own classroom contexts

and with the help of skilled colleagues (Fullan, 2001). Professional development from this perspective, therefore, not only involves teachers attending training sessions such as workshops or conferences but also receiving on-site technical assistance and mentoring in new instructional techniques (Little, 1990; Smylie, 1992). To ensure that preschool teachers receive this kind of training, policy makers in early education have begun to create different types of teacher consultant positions such as mentors and curriculum coaches. Because the intent of these positions is to improve curriculum quality in various early childhood settings, teacher consultants are usually exemplary teachers who use their expertise to help small groups of teachers learn and practice different instructional techniques.

This paper reports the findings of a time use study of one group of these teacher consultants. In the following sections, the literature on teacher consultants in early childhood education is reviewed, the policy context for this study is described, and the research methodology and findings are reported. This paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for policy and practice.

Research on Teacher Consultants in Early Childhood Education

In general, the work of teacher consultants is an under-researched area in early education. Much of the research that currently exists is located in the special education literature primarily because of changes in the role of early intervention specialists or itinerant teachers in recent years. In response to increasing numbers of young children with disabilities being included in regular educational settings, itinerant teachers have altered their role from direct service provision to children and families to on-site support to classroom teachers. This consulting relationship is described as a triadic one in which the itinerant teacher assists teaching staff to tailor curriculum and teaching strategies to meet the needs of the client or student with disabilities (File & Kontos, 1992). Despite the perceived shift in the role of itinerant teachers, studies have found that many of these consultants grapple with the concept of working for the child through the teaching staff.

In a survey of 229 itinerant teachers, Dinnebeil, McInerney, Roth, and Ramaswamy (2001), for example, found that these teachers provided direct services to children more frequently than engaging in consulting activities such as modeling intervention strategies to teaching staff. Interviews with itinerant teachers provide some insight into the challenges that they face when trying to work with classroom staff. First, there is the perception that many classroom teachers lack an understanding of the consulting role of the itinerant teacher and therefore are reluctant to take a more active role in the education of students with special needs when they are present in the classroom. Second, Sadler (2003), an early intervention specialist herself, argues that it is difficult for teacher consultants and classroom staff to understand the nature of their working relationship because of the vague procedural guidelines that often govern this relationship. In addition to confusion about their role, itinerant teachers also report that in some classrooms it is not possible to consult primarily with classroom staff if student needs are to be met (File & Kontos, 1992). From their perspective, the quality of some programs as well as the limited special education knowledge held by many classroom teachers necessitate that they work directly with the child (Wesley, Buysse, & Skinner, 2001).

These concerns apply to the work of teacher consultants in general education, as well. Like their counterparts in special education, teacher consultants working within some kind of reform project must alter their professional focus from children's learning and development to educating their adult peers in a variety of instructional settings. However, the work of itinerant teachers and teacher consulting roles attached to some kind of reform effort in early childhood differ in two important ways. First, whereas itinerant teachers are recognized for their specialist knowledge base and expertise in working with children with disabilities, teacher consultants may be working with teachers with more experience than themselves. Therefore, the expertise of teacher consultants may not be viewed as that different from what experienced classroom teachers

already know and do. Second, in current early childhood reform efforts, the focus of the consulting relationship is not so much on an individual client or child but on enhancing the overall quality of curriculum and instruction through teacher learning. Therefore, the scope of the work of teacher consultants is potentially broader than that of itinerant teachers and, as a consequence, may catalyze additional challenges and issues in practice. Although limited research is available, a small number of researchers using qualitative methods (Rust, 1993; Rust & Freidus, 2001; Silin & Schwartz, 2003) have begun to shed some light on the roles and functions adopted by teacher consultants working to effect change with classroom teachers.

In their case study of staff developers in Project New Beginnings, Silin and Schwartz (2003) observed these individuals taking on the distinct roles of strategist, translator, and advocate as they worked with kindergarten through third-grade teachers. As strategists, the staff developers worked with teachers to negotiate the tensions between new district initiatives and their efforts to become more learner centered in practice. In the role of translator, staff developers clarified the differing district policies for teachers, while as advocates, the staff developers moved beyond the classroom door to talk with administrators on behalf of teachers. Other studies have identified the additional roles of nurturer, teacher, learner, professional role model, coach, and curriculum developer (Rust & Freidus, 2001). In addition to the multiple functions that constitute the role of teacher consultants in reform efforts, the change facilitators in a study by Rust, Ely, Krasnow, and Miller (2001) elaborate on the ambiguous nature of their work in Head Start classrooms. As one facilitator put it, “You’re not a staff developer. You’re not a teacher. You’re not a supervisor. It’s a very anomalous position” (p. 21).

Further insights are offered from the K-12 educational sector where teacher consulting roles have been commonplace for some time and the perspectives of classroom teachers and their consultants have been studied (Miles, Saxl, & Lieberman, 1988; Smylie, 1992). The role ambiguity felt by some teacher consultants in early childhood reform initiatives has been attributed in this research base to the social and organizational contexts shaping the work of teacher consultants. In a study by Smylie and Denny (1990), for example, survey and interview data were collected from a group of 13 teacher consultants about their role and were compared with the responses of classroom teachers. Although teacher consultants defined their function as one of help giving, facilitation, and knowledge provision to teachers, they reported spending most of their time on district- and school-building-related work. Consequently, classroom teachers identified more benefits of teacher consultant roles for the school and district than they did for themselves. In a larger study that surveyed 116 K-8 teachers about their interactions with teacher consultants, Smylie (1992) found that teachers who thought receiving advice implied obligation interacted with teacher consultants much less frequently. Smylie (1992) concludes that as facilitators of change, teacher consultant roles often contradict the values of privacy, equality, and autonomy that structure the work of teaching.

In summary then, the work of teacher consultants, regardless of the focus of the consulting role and whether it occurs within prekindergarten or K-12 settings, appears to be a challenging one that is not easily understood or applied in educational contexts. Unlike the K-12 and special education research on teacher consultants, the literature located in early childhood settings is primarily qualitative and therefore does not evaluate these new leadership positions and their potential to effect change. In an effort to begin expanding the research base on teacher consultant roles in early childhood reform efforts, this paper details the findings of a time use study of a group of teacher consultants involved in a statewide, court-ordered preschool reform initiative.

The ways in which individuals organize and use their time can provide insight into the impact of public policies on work role and assist policy makers and administrators to plan for service delivery (Tarr & Barnett, 2001). The overall purpose of this inquiry, therefore, was to investigate how the time use of these teacher consultants compared with the policy rationale for the position. Guiding the study were the following research questions: (1) What are the demographic backgrounds of the teacher consultants, and how are their positions organized? (2) What

activities constitute the work of teacher consultants? (3) How do teacher consultants distribute their time among work activities? and (4) Does time use have any relationship to teacher consultant or district characteristics?

Method

Background to the Study

The teacher consultants who participated in this study were hired as a direct outcome of the *Abbott v. Burke*(1998) New Jersey Supreme Court decision. This decision ordered the state's 30 poorest or Abbott districts to provide well-planned, high-quality preschool programs for all eligible 3- and 4-year-old children beginning in the 1999-2000 school year. High-quality programs were defined as those having a class size of no more than 15 students with a certified teacher and teacher assistant in each class, a developmentally appropriate curriculum linked to the state's core curriculum content standards, and the provision of adequate facilities, special education, bilingual education, transportation, health, and other services as needed. As a way of transitioning this policy into practice, school districts were allowed to collaborate with existing community-based programs (e.g., child care, Head Start), and the leadership position of teacher consultant was created to facilitate quality improvement in these programs.

According to the job description of the New Jersey Department of Education (1999), teacher consultants were required to have a bachelor's degree and teacher certification, 3 to 5 years of experience in areas related to early education, and some background in providing professional development. Their responsibilities were to include coordinating and articulating with the district the professional development for child care teachers, in addition to directly mentoring and providing support to these teachers. The role of the teacher consultants, therefore, was not envisaged as a supervisory one so much as the provision of classroom-based training and other support activities that might help preschool teachers to alter and improve the quality of their curriculum and teaching practices.

Aside from this job description, the state gave individual districts sole authority over the employment of teacher consultants, their training, and induction into the job. No specific policy attention was given either at the state or district levels to the role of preschool teachers. If teachers were working in an Abbott-contracting classroom, then it was expected that they would work with a teacher consultant, but whether they welcomed and used their input and support was entirely voluntary.

Sample

Time diary interviews were collected from 35 teacher consultants over the 2001-2002 school year. To recruit participants for the study, the early childhood supervisor in each Abbott district was contacted to procure an accurate list of preschool teacher consultants. At the time of the study, only 25 of the 30 Abbott districts employed teacher consultants. To ensure that both large and small districts received adequate representation in the sample, a stratified random sampling design was employed. The list of teacher consultants was grouped into four levels of district size defined by the total number of teacher consultants employed (see Table 1). Teacher consultants were randomly selected from within each group. From the total population of 102 preschool teacher consultants, 55 were asked to participate in the study. After the selected teacher consultants were contacted, 17 people declined to participate. The most common reasons for not participating were work demands and limited time to commit to a lengthy interview. Aside from time constraints, three individuals chose not be interviewed because they were new to the job and still trying to make sense of their work duties. In addition to the 17 teacher consultants who declined to participate, two individuals contacted had already left the position, and one other was eliminated from the final data set because she was not a teacher consultant but rather a

district-wide trainer. Despite the nonparticipation of these 20 individuals, 35 teachers remained in the study, with a minimum of 50% of the total population of teacher consultants in each level of district being interviewed (see Table 1).

Table 1
Sampling Procedure

District Category	Number of Districts	Total Number TC*	Number of TC Selected	Number of TC in Study	% of District TC
Level 1 (1-2 TC)	8	11	6	4	67
Level 2 (3 TC)	5	12	8	7	88
Level 3 (4-7 TC)	9	41	21	14	67
Level 4 (12-13 TC)	3	38	20	10	50
Total	25	102	55	35	

*TC = teacher consultants.

Data Collection

To gain a sense of the kinds of activities that teacher consultants were involved in during a typical day, and therefore how their work time was allocated, the retrospective time diary method was used. This method involves asking respondents over the telephone to account for all of their activities over a 24-hour period in a structured interview. The retrospective time diary method is one of the most common measures of time use available and has been found to be a viable and reliable measure of individual time allocation (Barnett & Boyce, 1995; Juster, 1985). Validity and reliability studies show that the time use is not overly inflated or under-reported using retrospective time diaries and that this method produces "highly replicable and reliable results" (Robinson, 1985, p. 59), as compared to other measures such as leave-behind diaries and the use of observational procedures.

The interview protocol used in this study was based on findings from a pilot study in which the retrospective time diary method was used with 17 teacher consultants. Although the interview protocol used in the pilot study was effective in eliciting time use data, the research team also wanted to learn more about the teacher consultants as a population, as well as gain some sense of how their work was organized within each district. To meet these aims, the interview protocol used in the current study was divided into two parts.

The first section of the interview began with a set of questions designed to elicit information about each consultant's education, qualifications, and teaching and professional development experience. Because we also sought some insight into the organizational contexts structuring the work of teacher consultants, participants were asked several additional questions about their particular position, including how many classrooms they worked in, the auspice under which these classrooms were located (e.g., child care, public school), and whether they received any training to be a master teacher. Responses to these questions were noted directly onto a specially designed record form.

The second part of the interview concentrated solely on time use by asking participants to respond to a series of open-ended questions about their activities over the previous 24 hours. Because the interviews were conducted in the evening, the interviewer began by asking the teacher consultant, "Let's begin with 24 hours ago; were you doing any work-related activities?" If the answer was "no," the interviewer then asked the participant to recall the time that he or

she began work the previous day. The interviewer then asked the teacher consultant what the consultant did at the time he or she began work for the day and when this activity ended. These responses (including the segment of time when the teacher consultant was not working) were manually recorded verbatim on a record sheet. To gain more specific information about how the time was being used in each particular work activity, a number of probes were also employed to elicit information about the nature of the task, who else was involved, where the work took place, and if any other activity was occurring at the same time. If the teacher consultant reported doing two activities simultaneously (e.g., having a meeting during lunch), the interviewer recorded the amount of time spent on each task. Once the work task allocated to the first time period had been accounted for, the same questions were asked again for the next task and time block by asking the interviewee, "What did you do next?" These time blocks were not predetermined according to a set period such as every 30 minutes but corresponded to how the individual reported using his or her time (e.g., 40 minutes meeting with a teacher or 15 minutes paperwork). At the conclusion of the interview, length of time spent on each activity was noted in minutes, and the total work time was calculated for each teacher consultant.

The second author conducted all of the interviews in the evenings between the months of October and February in the 2001-2002 school year. Care was taken to interview teacher consultants on differing workdays so that it might be possible to determine whether time use varied across day of the week or month of the year.

Data Analysis

The data record was analyzed in relation to each of the research questions and involved three main phases. In the first phase, descriptive statistics were calculated for the questions in the first part of the interview protocol in order to generate demographics and provide a portrait of how the teacher consultant position was organized in districts.

Analysis of the data in the second phase was concerned solely with the time use data and involved several steps. First, a coding scheme that was developed in the pilot study was used to examine the time diaries. To develop this coding scheme, two members of the research team individually read the time diaries collected in the pilot study several times and assigned categories to different kinds of activity. The coders then compared their activity categories, and where disagreement occurred, both researchers examined the activity to determine the best descriptor or code. Through this process of comparison, activity codes that were somewhat similar were refined to clarify the setting and focus of particular functions. For example, paperwork tasks for the district and paperwork conducted in relation to centers or teachers were distinguished. The final coding scheme consisted of 18 different activities.

To ensure that the coding scheme adequately reflected the tasks involved in a typical workday of a teacher consultant, the activity categories were compared with qualitative data collected on one teacher consultant during the same school year (Ryan & Hornbeck, in press). This teacher consultant was shadowed once a month, and field notes were used to detail the kinds of tasks in which she engaged, the people with whom she worked, and the rationale behind her actions. The qualitative data collected on this teacher consultant was coded using the scheme developed to analyze the time diaries. Chunks of text pertaining to the coded activities were then collated, and the number of times the teacher consultant participated in them over the year was recorded. Our results showed that the coding scheme accurately portrayed the daily activities associated with being a teacher consultant.

To describe the work actions of the 35 teacher consultants in the current study, the coding scheme was modified slightly to include screening and enrollment, two activities not reported by the sample in the pilot study. The final coding scheme consisted of 20 activities (see Table 2) that were collapsed into five major categories—technical assistance, professional development, district-related work, leadership activities, and other—to provide a sense of the main foci of the

work of teacher consultants and whether these actions reflected the policy intent of their position. To ensure the reliability of the scheme, all three members of the research team used the coding scheme blindly on a subsample of eight time diary interviews. There was over 80% agreement among team members. Where disagreement occurred, the team examined the activity together to determine the best descriptor. All time diaries were then analyzed using the coding scheme, and the total number of minutes spent on each activity was calculated as a percentage of the total day's work time for each individual teacher consultant.

Table 2
Activity Codes

Categories	Activities
Technical assistance	Direct classroom assistance Meetings with teachers Meetings with director Rapport building Substitute teaching Paperwork Phone calls
Professional development	Workshop planning Leading workshops
District-related work	Policy Curriculum Screening Enrollment Supervision District paperwork
Leadership activities	Supporting colleagues Attending training
Other	Driving Breaks Miscellaneous

The next step in analyzing the time diary data required generating descriptive statistics to examine the distribution of time in the various activity codes across the total group of teacher consultants. To ensure reliability of the results, distributions of time were first examined to determine whether time use varied by day of the week or month of the year. Although time use by teacher consultants was only surveyed once, no variation was found in time allocation across day or month. In order to provide an accurate account of teacher consultant time use, the activity codes reported by less than 20% of the sample were not examined. That is, activities such as enrollment, curriculum, and supervision that were identified by very few teacher consultants and therefore were not the norm for most of the sample were excluded from the time use analysis. To calculate how time was distributed among the remaining 13 activities during one workday, the mean time allocated to each activity was then weighted in relation to the percentage of teacher consultants reporting the activity. Because of the large number of activity codes, a series of factor analyses for differing thresholds of time (10 minutes, 20 minutes, and 60 minutes) were then conducted to determine whether there were any patterns of time use between these different activities.

In the final phase of data analysis, correlations were used to examine relationships between teacher consultant characteristics, district variables, and time distribution in various work functions. The findings from these phases of analysis are presented in the next section according to the research questions.

Findings

What Are the Demographic Backgrounds of the Teacher Consultants, and How Are Their Positions Organized?

Reflecting the job description, all teacher consultants participating in the study held at least a bachelor's degree and were certified teachers. The majority of individuals (86%) had completed some graduate work, and 4% of the teacher consultants surveyed had attained a master's degree. Forty percent of the teacher consultants reported having some specialized early education training in their degree programs, and 66% were certified to teach early childhood education. Overall, the average amount of time that teacher consultants had worked in classrooms was 16.1 years, and many of them (69%) had taught preschool-age children during this time. Almost half of the teacher consultants (46%) were in their first year on the job, and many (57%) reported that they had not received any formal training in preparation for their role. However, 80% of the teacher consultants had some experience providing professional development to other teachers.

Table 3 summarizes the number of classrooms that teacher consultants were assigned to work with, as well as the location of these classrooms. Although the Department of Education recommended that teacher consultants were to work with 20 classrooms or fewer, almost half of the sample (48%) were assigned higher numbers of classrooms as part of their caseload. Because many school districts did not have adequate facilities to provide preschool, most teacher consultants either worked solely with teachers in child care classrooms (60%) or in a mixture of public and community-based settings.

Table 3
Caseload and Location of Classrooms

Caseload	Number of TC*	% of TC	Classroom Location	Number of TC	% of TC
20 Classrooms or fewer	18	52	Child care	21	60
21 - 30 Classrooms	13	37	Public school	3	9
More than 30 classrooms	4	11	Mix	11	31

*TC = teacher consultants.

What Activities Constitute the Work of Teacher Consultants?

As previously indicated (see Table 2), the teacher consultants in this study reported 20 different activities as constituting their workload. On average, individuals performed seven different functions during their workday, and at least one of these actions involved supporting teacher learning either through professional development or technical assistance activities. Although 23% reported giving training sessions to preschool teachers during the specific work day, 69% of the teacher consultants said they prepared for workshops that they were intending to give to teachers in the near future. Over half of the teacher consultants (57%) visited preschool programs to provide direct classroom assistance to teachers or meet with program directors. Teacher consultants also engaged in a number of tasks related to their center work including meeting with classroom teachers (46%), making phone calls (49%), or completing paperwork (40%) such as writing up their observation notes after visiting a classroom. Twenty-nine percent of the teacher consultants were engaged in rapport building with centers, such as dropping by unannounced to say hello to center staff. A small number of participants (11%) stepped in and took over teaching in classrooms to help out until a substitute teacher could be found or to enable preschool teachers to attend workshops.

In addition to their center-related work, the majority of teacher consultants (60%) also performed work for the district; most of this work involved administrative paperwork of some kind. Thirty-four percent engaged in policy work such as reviewing a new assessment tool for the district or meeting to discuss the state mentoring requirement for new teachers. Small numbers of teacher consultants (17%) reported supervising for the district, such as overseeing an after-school program. Other district-related work included enrolling children (6%), screening children with an assessment tool (3%), or writing curriculum (3%).

Because a major focus of their job description required that teacher consultants work in the community with teachers in preschool programs, nearly all of them (80%) reported driving and taking breaks (83%). Miscellaneous activities—such as returning books borrowed from a preschool teacher—were identified by 37% of the sample. Fourteen percent of the teacher consultants engaged in leadership activities such as attending training for their own development.

How Do Teacher Consultants Distribute Their Time among Work Activities?

On average, teacher consultants worked a 7-hour day, primarily distributing this time among 13 activities. In keeping with the policy intent of the position, much of the teacher consultants' time was spent on professional development activities (24%) and providing assistance in classrooms (15%). Although a small number of teacher consultants (23%) spent an average of 28 minutes of their workday giving workshops to preschool teachers, the largest amount of time given to any activity was planning for workshops. Sixty-nine percent of the teacher consultants worked an average of 75 minutes in preparation for workshops that they were intending to give to preschool teachers. The second largest category of time was spent in classrooms providing assistance to teachers, which took on average 63 minutes of the workday. Over half the sample (60%) gave an average of 53 minutes of their time to completing district paperwork of some kind. The paperwork associated with center-based work such as direct classroom assistance constituted 9% of the workday. Teacher consultants tended to spend less than 8% of their workday on rapport building, meeting with center staff, phone calls, driving, and breaks. Means and percentages of the time spent on the 13 activity codes in a workday are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Teacher Consultant Time Use

Activity	% of Teachers	Mean Number of Minutes	% of Total Workday
Technical assistance			
Direct classroom assistance	57	63	15
Meetings with teacher	46	20	5
Meetings with director	54	24	6
Rapport building	29	14	3
Paperwork	40	37	9
Phone calls	49	13	3
Professional development			
Workshop planning	69	75	18
Giving workshops	23	28	6
District-related work			
Paperwork	60	53	12
Policy	34	20	5

Other			
Driving	80	24	6
Breaks	83	28	6
Miscellaneous	37	27	6

The factor analysis revealed three patterns of time use that showed minimal variation when computed for different thresholds of time (see Table 5). Factor 1 is a district factor indicating that the more time spent on policy work and breaks, the less time was given to district paperwork. Factors 2 and 3 provide the most insight into whether the time use of teacher consultants reflected the intent of their position. Factor 2 is concerned with teacher development and shows the links between the main foci of their role—professional development and technical assistance. The more time spent on phone calls and miscellaneous activities, the less likely teacher consultants were to engage in activities associated with teacher learning, such as workshop preparation and direct classroom assistance. In contrast, factor 3, or the workshop factor, suggests that activities related to working with teachers in centers (driving, paperwork, and meetings with center staff) are less likely to take up the teacher consultants' time if they are engaged in professional development activities.

Table 5
Factor Analysis of Teacher Consultant Time Use

Activity Variables	**Factors**		
	1	**2**	**3**
Breaks	.422		
Driving		-.219	.617
Miscellaneous		.997	
Direct classroom assistance		-.202	
Meeting with director			.377
Meeting with teacher			.425
Paperwork for center/classroom			.517
Paperwork for district	-.261		.270
Phone calls		.430	
Policy	1.015		
Rapport			
Workshops			-.277
Workshop planning		-.371	-.648

Does Time Use Have Any Relationship to Teacher Consultant or District Characteristics?

We were interested in knowing whether there were any relationships between the demographic backgrounds of the sample of teacher consultants and how time was allocated among various work activities. No significant relationships were found when correlations were computed for teacher characteristics in relation to the time distribution in various activity codes and each factor index. That is, teacher consultants regardless of educational background, teaching experience, and professional development expertise used their time in similar ways on a given workday.

Correlations to determine whether some of the conditions structuring the work of teacher consultants were related to the size of the district also revealed no significant relationships. The

total number of classrooms teacher consultants were assigned, the setting or auspice in which these classrooms were located, and whether teacher consultants had been trained for their role were not found to vary because of the size of the district. Similarly, none of the district variables was found to correlate with the way teacher consultants distributed time among the various activity categories.

Discussion

This study reports the time use of 35 teacher consultants employed to provide curriculum assistance and professional development to teachers working in a range of early childhood settings. Although the findings are based on self-reported data and therefore should be treated cautiously, the patterns of work activity and time use revealed by the teacher consultants do offer some insights into how this role might be used more effectively for helping under-qualified teachers improve the quality of their classroom practices.

In general, the teacher consultants in this study spent most of their time working toward the aim of teacher learning by planning and giving workshops, meeting with teachers, and assisting them in their classrooms. These activities reflected the intent of their official job description, which was to mentor, support, and provide professional development and curriculum assistance to preschool teachers. At the same time, however, they also distributed the time they spent with preschool teachers among an array of other activities, many of them for the district, such as screening, enrollment, and paperwork. All jobs require that individuals engage in some activities that may be less related to the focus of their position; however, given that some 48% of the teacher consultants in this study were also working with more than 20 classrooms, it is possible that having so many different activities associated with their position may have limited the amount of attention given to the training and support of teachers. Policy makers are advised to strive to ensure that teacher consultants are able to work intensively with teachers on the change project if instructional practices are to be improved. One means to achieve this aim is to clearly prioritize and clarify the functions of this position so that teacher consultants can articulate a role bounded by a small group of actions. In other words, the specific functions of technical assistance and professional development need to be outlined in much more detail, and the amount of time that teacher consultants should be spending out in classrooms doing such work also needs to be specified.

In addition to the multiple functions being performed by teacher consultants, the patterns of time use associated with the main purposes of their work also warrant some consideration by policy makers. The largest proportion of time given to any activity by the teacher consultants was workshop planning and, after driving and breaks, was performed by more teacher consultants than any other function. Although the average time allocated to workshop planning and direct classroom assistance was not that dissimilar across the group, fewer teacher consultants reported direct classroom assistance as part of their workday, and less time in total was given to this activity in comparison to workshop planning. Similarly, the factor analysis indicates that there is less opportunity for teacher consultants to spend time with teachers in centers if they are engaged in workshop planning and the giving of workshops. Because 46% of the teacher consultants were in their first year on the job, and over half of them reported not receiving any targeted training for their new leadership role, it is quite feasible that they may have had to spend some time learning about specific facets of the instructional reform itself, such as the curriculum model being used in the district, before they were ready to give workshops and work with teachers in classrooms.

It is not sensible to rely on the experience and qualifications of teacher consultants alone, because it cannot be assumed that similar qualifications and years of experience equate with a baseline of expertise for a leadership position. Despite being well educated, many of the teacher consultants in this study had not received any specialized early childhood training in their own professional preparation. Moreover, research on teacher preparation (Early & Winton, 2001) and

recent national policy reports (*Eager to Learn*, Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001) argue that many qualified teachers need to update their professional knowledge base because they have not been adequately prepared to educate young children within the current economic and social context. Therefore, policy makers are advised to ensure that teacher consultants are adequately prepared for the different kinds of functions associated with this kind of work. The literature on leadership in early education suggests that the content of such training include adult and professional development theory, the process of change, communication skills, and modeling (Whitebook & Bellm, 1996). An effective training program will also address how to manage the change process with experienced teachers as well as provide teacher consultants with a sound understanding of the instructional content and practices required of the reform itself.

Studies of the professional development of teachers have shown time and again that reform efforts usually do not get successfully implemented because educators do not receive enough support in the area requiring innovation (Fullan, 2001). The creation of consulting roles is a thoughtful effort by policy makers to facilitate the kinds of teacher learning that will lead to children receiving a high-quality preschool education. The findings of this study indicate, however, that if teacher consultants are to have their intended impact, attention must be given to both preparing them for this new role and bounding their work responsibilities. Further research is also needed to inform policy makers about how best to use this new line of work to improve program quality. As researchers and policy makers embark on these efforts, we should also remain focused on the bigger vision of creating a qualified workforce. Structures in higher education and elsewhere need to be created that will lead not only to the development of knowledgeable classroom teachers but also to a new cadre of teacher leaders who are not simply administrators but who possess the specialized early childhood knowledge to initiate improvement efforts. When early childhood educators themselves are leaders of quality improvement initiatives, policies aimed at a qualified workforce will have reached their intended mark.

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