Ushering in a New Day for Teacher Preparation

The 21st classroom room is ever changing in the student dynamics, academic accountability, and technology demands. Prospective teachers must be prepared to tackle these aspects on the first day in the classroom. Wong and Wong (2001) stated that it takes three years for teachers to surpass the “survival” stage of being a teacher. Fuller (1969) went on to say that those beginning years are also focused on classroom management more than preparing lessons for the specific needs of the learners. The trend of waiting three years for a teacher to be “ready” is no longer acceptable. A multi-year study (Authors, 2012) demonstrated the impact of a yearlong clinical experience on the preparedness of undergraduate students for the classroom. A yearlong clinical experience provided teacher candidates with an opportunity to study under a veteran practicing teacher for an entire academic year. Teacher candidates participated and facilitated academic lessons, behavior and classroom management, parent teacher conferences, RTI meetings, faculty meetings, PTA meetings, bus duty, and all other aspects that arise in a given school year. The results of this mixed method study showed that the teacher candidates with more contact hours in the classroom, fully emerged in the practice of teaching, had the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of a second year teacher upon graduation. Thus, ready to tackle the ever changing classroom with confidence.

This proposed study will have two focuses: (1) examine the impact of an intensive 36-hour Masters of Arts in Teaching program that encompasses a yearlong clinical experience and (2) compare the results of the undergraduate study with that of the study involving graduate students. The difference in the study will be the participants are graduate students, mostly career changes, with professional identities other than a teacher identity. The participants are Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellows, who enter the MAT program with strong content knowledge. The MAT program is 36 credit-hours that focus on pedagogical content knowledge for the teaching of mathematics and sciences for diverse secondary and middle school learners. Fellows receive instruction from discipline specific pedagogy instructors, as well as, instruction in the integration of technology into instruction, English learners, and learners with exceptionalities. All instruction is integrated in a scaffolded method.

Focus One will be a mixed method study will have 36 participants over three years. Data will be collected over the three semester program through the Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale - long form (TSES; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), distributed each semester, and a Reflection on Growth and Development Assignment that participants will complete at the end of each semester. The assigned cooperating teacher will also be interviewed to provide additional data on the growth of the teacher candidate. A content analysis (Covert 1977) approach will be utilized to reflections and interviews and the appropriate statistical test will be used to analyze the quantitative data. The researchers are engaged in various aspects with the participants, but none are instructors in the program. Thus power issues are eliminated. Once Focus One is completed, attention will be given to Focus Two with a cross analysis of the two groups.
During the round table discussion, the researchers will provide a more detailed overview of the study with undergraduate students participating in a yearlong clinical internship and engage the audience in a discussion of the interest and value of the study, the implication for the education community, as well as, discuss the research design and possible theoretical foundations. This valued discussion will help structure a stronger study.

References


