Impact of a Yearlong Placement in a PDS on Teacher Interns’ Dispositions and Abilities to Teach Middle School

As students prepare to enter college and the workforce, there has been a demand for them to be more independent, critical thinkers, innovative designers, and thoughtful collaborators. This preliminary study describes how a Professional Development School (PDS) partnership, between a middle school and a university provides a more authentic teaching opportunity for middle grades teacher interns compared to the traditional, middle grades internship route. An authentic teaching experience provides a successful transition from “student to teacher” through a collaborative work environment; observing and developing the dispositions of an effective teacher; and learning the culture and structure of a school. The traditional middle grades internship route has been found to undermine the time needed to build relationships with students, cooperating teachers, and schools. The PDS partnership has alleviated this by securing a yearlong placement in one middle school leading to more confident, effective teachers prepared to engage the 21st century learner.

Purpose
The purpose of this study was to determine the dispositions and confidence of middle grades pre-service teachers after completing a yearlong field placement in a Professional Development School (PDS) setting.

Perspectives
The debate among educational professionals on whether educating middle school students focuses more on their social and emotional development rather than their intellect has been under scrutiny for years now (Andrews & Anafara, 2003). As universities work toward improving their education programs, they must consider improving their relationships with schools. It is not a secret that schools and universities have different ideas about what quality teaching looks like. One issue that has continuously arisen during pre-service teachers’ internship has been the strong suggestion that they should disregard the instruction received in their education courses, suggesting that it does not apply to classroom teaching (Teitel, 2003). Studies also indicate that schools lack the readiness to support teacher interns as these graduates quickly lose the approaches they learned in their education courses once they begin teaching full time (Teitel, 2003). For this reason, colleges of education are focusing more on establishing Professional Development School (PDS) partnerships in order to renew schools and teacher education simultaneously (Teitel, 2003) so that schools and universities can work together toward the cooperative development of future teachers and student learning.
Contribution

As students prepare to enter college and the workforce, there has been a demand for them to be more independent, critical thinkers, innovative designers, and thoughtful collaborators. This paper describes how a Professional Development School (PDS) partnership, between a middle school and university provides a more authentic teaching opportunity for middle grades teacher interns compared to the traditional, middle grades internship route. An authentic teaching experience provides a successful transition from “student to teacher” through a collaborative work environment; observing and developing the dispositions of an effective teacher; and learning the culture and structure of a school. The traditional middle grades internship route has been found to undermine the time needed to build relationships with students, cooperating teachers, and schools. The PDS partnership has alleviated this by securing a yearlong placement in one middle school leading to more confident, effective teachers prepared to engage the 21st century learner.

Methods

The study employed pretest-posttest design and used a qualitative research methodology. To determine teacher interns’ assessment of their dispositions to be effective middle school teachers and assessment of their abilities to teach middle school, data were collected using the Teacher’s Dispositions Index (TDI) and a series of open-ended questions to determine their feelings of confidence toward beginning their first year of teaching.

Participants for this study included 39 pre-service middle grades teachers of which 19 were placed in a professional development school setting and 20 were placed in a traditional middle school – non-PDS group. The PDS group of teacher interns remained in one school for duration of eight months where they changed content within the same team of teachers after 3 months teaching in their first content area. The non-PDS group of teacher interns spent four months in one middle school teaching in their first content area and then moved to another middle school to teach in their second content area for the remaining five months of the school year.

Results

The results indicate that a yearlong internship placement has proven to offer middle school teacher interns more experience into the practical nature of teaching while still applying the theory learned in the university. The research data supports the idea that a yearlong internship placement has a positive impact on the development of effective teacher dispositions. It is believed that this route to teacher preparation will create a significant pool of experienced future teachers due to its offering an authentic teaching experience.

Implications

Based on the data collected, our teacher preparation program plans to move forward with a yearlong internship model instead of a dual placement model. Our next steps are to begin working toward developing a “true” PDS environment. We would like to start by determining the needs of our middle schools and providing professional development opportunities based on their needs. By supporting the needs of our middle schools, it will
provide university professors with a first hand look into the types of training and knowledge future teachers will need in order to be more developed for a career in teaching (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). More importantly, the university can seek the assistance of middle school teachers and administrators in providing such training. This not only gives middle school teachers a part in the instruction of future teachers, but it also gives them a vested interest in these students’ development as well as their own development (Sandholtz, 2002). By taking the PDS approach to future teacher training, our program will secure more quality schools and teachers for internship placement thus allowing our university-school partnerships to work toward the development of confident and effective future educators.

References


