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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted concerning the development, implementation, and evaluation of a preservice teacher field practicum for a content area reading course. The evaluation includes supervising and preservice teachers' survey results identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the field placement. Survey participants included 11 students enrolled in 2 content area reading courses; all 11 were seeking initial teacher certification through the college's teacher education program. Teachers were placed at two middle schools in the same content areas in which they were seeking certification. The survey was given to preservice and supervising teachers twice. The preservice teachers self-rated survey responses showed consistency in overall positive view of their performance; however, supervising teachers offered mixed results on the strengths and needs of the field placement program. Evaluation findings include implications for the next content area field practicum. (NKA)

Every Practicum Has a Story: Designing An Effective Content Area Reading Practicum

For Preservice Teachers

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Every Practicum Has A Story: Designing An Effective Content Area Reading Practicum For Preservice Teachers

Abstract

This study concerns the development, implementation and evaluation of a preservice teacher field practicum for a Content Area Reading Course. The evaluation includes supervising and preservice teachers' survey results identifying strengths and weaknesses of the field placement. Conclusions including implications for the next content area field practicum discussed.

Every Practicum Has A Story: Designing An Effective Content Area Reading Practicum For Preservice Teachers

Our college's teacher education faculty had discussed the need to add a content area reading course to content area preservice teachers' education requirements for many years. But, with our state education department's regulations capping the number of required methods courses' credit hours (Virginia Licensure Regulations, 1993) coupled with limited faculty resources, the needed addition remained in the wishful thinking category. Then, in Spring 1999, all teacher education schools in the state were mandated to submit restructured teacher education programs adding a number of new competencies (Virginia Licensure Regulations, 1998). Our teacher education faculty welcomed one new requirement—a Content Area Reading Course for preservice teachers in all content areas! This course had been a part of the graduate course of study for reading specialists for years; thus, the faculty felt it would be a simple process to offer the course at the undergraduate/graduate preservice teacher level. As it turned out, this was a first misconception in planning and instructing a new course!

The course was planned during the 1999 summer and offered in the fall semester for those beginning the teacher education programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels who are content area majors and seeking initial certification in grades 6-12 or in grades preschool through 12. Throughout the course, a major obstacle for students' understanding of the material was that preservice teachers did not have access to public school students! This, in turn, limited the opportunity to try newly learned instructional strategies with real students with lessons based on the state's standards of learning requirements in each content area using public school texts! Thus, the second misconception in planning and instructing a new course emerged—the idea that a content area reading course could be effectively taught to preservice teachers without a field placement!

To remedy the situation, collaborative discussions began immediately and continued throughout the remainder of the academic year between the college literacy professors and two assistant superintendents in the college's partnership school system to develop the needed practicum. By June 2000, plans were in place for the new practicum to start with the fall semester.

You would think, for teacher education faculty members with up to twenty-five years of professorial experience in making field placements, that adding a new field experience to a course would be a cinch. This became the third misconception since adding a new field experience for preservice teachers involves many people, forms, procedures and a

considerable amount of planning and evaluation to develop an effective and valuable field experience. Perhaps, some background information is needed.

BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY

First, a review of literature yielded the perfect article—a 1983 content area practicum description that had been implemented by Memory (Memory, 1983). The author developed and implemented a 10-hour practicum with one hour of fieldwork per week. Also mentioned were visits and discussions with local school personnel which were needed to explain what preservice teachers needed to develop lessons utilizing content area reading strategies within the content area major with the public school students' lessons and texts. Even though coordinating all of these variables was considerable, it needed to be considered in context with the positive impact the placement could have on a secondary student who needed extra academic help. Thus, finding such placements had complications but the benefit to the students presented a persuasive argument to school administrators in Memory's opinion (Memory).

Similar steps were taken in setting up our content area field placement by first discussing it with school assistant superintendents, then with principals at two middle schools. Since state standards of learning tests are given in grades 3, 5, 8 and in high school subjects, preservice teachers were assigned to sixth and seventh grade teachers in courses representing the preservice teacher's chosen content area of study so they could give extra instruction where needed. A 10-hour practicum was arranged for a five-week period to include two hours per week to accommodate the preservice teachers' lesson plans with study guides and other content area reading activities studied. Material packets were developed to be placed in each supervising teacher's school mailbox prior to the beginning of the placement. Each packet included typical teacher education placement forms which were altered slightly or developed to suit the course such as a general information sheet for the placement, an overall planner of days and times for the 5 weeks, a general evaluation form for the preservice teacher's performance at midterm (after four hours) and final (after 10 hours), a log to record the hours, a lesson plan form, and a preservice teacher's personal schedule form to be completed at placement. Also, included in the packet were a calendar for September through October with dates marked for each week's agenda to be completed and the preservice teachers' evaluations included 13 items and a space for comments. As soon as the course instructor knew the number of each content area placements needed, the principals made the placements and a short meeting between each preservice and supervising teacher was held in each supervising teacher's classroom for the two to get acquainted, arrange the placement schedule and discuss the lessons and students for the field experience.

Another very helpful portion of Memory's article (Memory, 1983) was the organization of the content reading course. Memory presented material that could be especially

helpful in tutoring such as prereading, vocabulary development, comprehension and questioning strategies prior to general whole class instructional techniques. Other important essentials covered in the beginning of Memory's course and required in the practicum were detailed lesson plans including objectives, specific activities in motivational, comprehension and vocabulary instructional strategies selected for content area suitability, lesson assessment and the lesson's results. Preservice teachers utilized instructional strategies required by the course instructor and other were selected from class resources.

Like Memory's (1983) practicum, our teacher education program's course was arranged so that at the beginning of the semester, the preservice teachers received lesson plan instruction in preinstructional strategies for motivation, as well as instructional activities in vocabulary instruction and practice, reading comprehension, written expression strategies and in assessments of lessons. The majority of activities came from the course text by Richardson and Morgan, Reading To Learn In The Content Areas (2000). Other instructional information such as cooperative groups, text evaluation, professional readings, and theory was postponed to the last half of the course since these were not needed in the preservice teachers' lessons. Two lesson plans were required and followed our college's general lesson plan format for placements and Memory's too (Memory, 1983), with the exception of adding the state standards of learning. Through the 10 hours, when teachers requested other lessons to be taught, the preservice teachers were to use newly learned instructional techniques.

One of the main problems noted by Memory (1983) was that the practicum effectiveness was not formally evaluated, although there were some verbal indications, mostly positive comments reported by students and other teacher education instructors and a few negative comments. Thus, the one item that was essential for our new 10-hour field placement in the content area reading course and absent from Memory's (Memory'1983) was a formal evaluation of the placement's effectiveness. Both supervising and preservice teachers were surveyed twice and their results compared. The first was after four hours of field placement (two weeks) so that strengths and needs could be identified and dealt with early in the program if possible. The same survey was administered at the end of the program during the fifth week of placement, tallied, and comparisons made between the preservice and supervising teachers' responses. Conclusions are drawn on the effectiveness including strengths and weaknesses of the program, what to keep and what needs refining before next year's placement!

METHOD

Participants

The participants included 11 students enrolled in two Content Area Reading Courses. Nine preservice teachers were undergraduates enrolled in the undergraduate course and two were enrolled in the graduate course in the college's MAT program. (Other graduate students were enrolled in the graduate course but all were employed as

teachers and did not need a field placement). All 11 were seeking initial teacher certification through the college's teacher education program. Their primary fields of study in which they were seeking certification were: 3 in English, 1 in social studies, 4 in health and physical education and 3 in art. Principals at two middle schools (grades 6-8) placed the preservice teachers with 11 teachers in the same content specialties. The instructor assigned preservice teachers to each school by content areas so that each school had two in health and physical education, one school had two English placements while the other had one and one social studies, and one school had one art while the other had the remaining two.

Materials

The survey instrument was in the form of a one page memo and included a table with 10 items to rate; 3 on lesson plans, 2 on instructional strategies, one in assessment, 2 on working with children, one on use of the textbook and one on the 10 hour placement program. Preservice and supervising teachers responded by giving one of three value ratings for each item: 1) needs much work, 2) needs some work, and 3) does not need work as this is a strength. The survey included a brief explanation of the survey purpose and provided a space for comments. There were two differences in the preservice and supervising teacher surveys. The first was in the memo address: one to preservice teachers and the other to the supervising teachers. The second difference was that the envelopes, stamped and addressed to the course instructor, accompanied the supervising teacher surveys with instructions that all surveys were to be completed and mailed anonymously to the instructor. The preservice teachers were requested to place their forms in a folder containing all surveys from their two classes. In addition to the written request in the survey instructions for anonymous completion, the instructor verbally requested this of the preservice respondents. Survey I or Survey II was recorded at the top of each set of surveys. For this paper, they are referred to as Survey 1 and Survey 2 respectively for consistency and simplicity.

Data Collection

The survey was given to preservice and supervising teachers twice. The first was placed in the supervising teachers' school mailboxes during week two of the five week placement for the teachers to rate the program by the end of that week's work after preservice teachers had completed approximately four hours of placement work. A cut-off date was set and any surveys received after that date were not included in the tally. The preservice teachers were given their surveys during the week two class after completing the first four hours of placement. The same procedures were used for the second survey, which was given out in October at the completion of the five weeks at the end of the ten-hour placement. A cut off date set. Again, any surveys received after that date were not included in the tally.

Scoring and Data Analysis

So that data for preservice and supervising teachers could be studied separately and compared, the two groups' (supervising and preservice teachers) responses were tallied

and recorded in two tables, one for each group with each table including both surveys' results. Response percentages for each of the three ratings (1--needs much work, 2--needs some work, and--does not need any work, this is a strength) by both groups of teachers are listed for the 10 items (see Table 1 and Table 2).

RESULTS

Table 1

All eleven preservice teachers responded to Survey 1 with response percentages recorded in the PS1 (preservice teacher Survey 1) column for each of the three ratings (see Table 1). Since one of the preservice teachers was absent on the day of the second survey completion, Survey 2 included ten responses recorded in percentages in the three ratings under the PS2 (preservice teacher Survey 2) column. After working in the field experience for approximately four hours, a majority (over 50% of the respondents) of preservice teachers indicated they felt they possessed strengths in six of the ten items in Survey 1 which were: working with students, the value of the 10-hour field placement, vocabulary instruction, reading guide instructional, writing lesson plans and in writing objectives. This positive self-assessment remained at six items by the end of the 10 hours or five weeks of fieldwork! Five areas of strength were the same as on Survey I but the sixth switched from the instruction of a reading guide to the assessment of the lesson. The only area receiving lower than 50% of responses in strengths was in working with the textbook and the majority of preservice teachers felt they had some needs in this area. Thus, preservice teachers rated themselves as knowledgeable in lesson planning, including writing lesson plans and objectives as well as in giving instruction in vocabulary, use of reading guides, in working in a classroom setting and in working with at-risk students. They appeared to rank themselves the highest with writing objectives with products for their students to produce and in assessment of the lesson. Also, by Survey 2, SOL criteria received a higher percentage, one-half of respondents, of strength ratings. Overall, a majority of the preservice teachers rated the 10-hour field placement at a strength for preservice teachers in planning, instruction and in assessment.

Even though the preservice teachers had few responses in the needs much work rating, eight areas, with the exceptions of state criteria and assessment, received some responses in Survey 1 but only three in Survey 2. However, at least two preservice teachers indicated in each of three areas that they needed much work when working with at-risk children, working in a classroom setting and that the 10-hour field placement needed much work to be an effective experience. Thus, even though the majority of preservice teachers had positive responses in all 10 items, there were areas such as working in a classroom setting and especially with at-risk children that need much work by at least two of the preservice teachers to make the field experience more valuable to them.

Table 1
Preservice Teachers' Survey Ratings*

Ratings (across) Rate this field placement program in the 10 areas listed below based on your opinion from your observations	NEEDS MUCH WORK		NEEDS SOME WORK		DOES NOT NEED WORK/ THIS IS A STRENGTH	
	PS1**	PS2***	PS1	PS2	PS1	PS2
1. Lesson Plans	9%		18%	40%	73%	60%
2. SOL**** Familiarity			82%	50%	18%	50%
3. Writes Objectives with Products	18%		27%	20%	55%	80%
4. Vocabulary Instruction	27%		9%	40%	64%	60%
5. Use of Reading Guide for Text	9%		27%	50%	64%	50%
6. Assessment of Lessons			64%	20%	36%	80%
7. Work with an At-risk Child	18%	20%	46%	30%	36%	50%
8. Work with Textbook	18%		36%	70%	36%	20%
9. Work with Students in a Classroom Setting	36%	20%		10%	55%	70%
10. A 10-hour Field Placement for Preservice Teacher	9%	20%	27%	10%	55%	70%

*All ratings are reported in percentages that have been rounded off. Numbers 8, 9 and 10 are off the 100% tally due to one student not responding to these three items in one or both surveys..

** PS1 is the abbreviation for preservice teachers' Survey I.

***PS2 is the abbreviation for preservice teachers' Survey II.

****SOL is the acronym for the state's Standards of Learning curriculum requirements for public schools.

Table 2

Six of the eleven supervising teachers responded to Survey 1 and seven teachers responded to Survey 2. Responses were tallied for each survey and percentages calculated for each rating within each of the ten items (see Table 2). In both surveys, a majority (over 50 % or responses) of teachers reported the field placement had strengths

Table 2
Supervising Teachers' Survey Ratings*

Ratings (across) Rate this field placement program in the 10 areas listed below based on your opinion from your observations	NEEDS MUCH WORK		NEEDS SOME WORK		DOES NOT NEED WORK/ THIS IS A STRENGTH	
	SS1**	SS2***	SS1	SS2	SS1	SS2
1. Lesson Plans		14%	33%	29%	67%	57%
2. SOL**** Familiarity			17%	57%	83%	43%
3. Writes Objectives with Products *			33%	29%	67%	57%
4. Vocabulary Instruction *		14%	50%	14%	50%	57%
5. Use of Reading Guide for Text *	17%		17%	57%	67%	29%
6. Assessment of Lessons *		29%	50%		50%	57%
7. Work with an At-risk Child *	33%	14%	33%	29%	17%	43%
8. Work with Textbook *	17%		17%	14%	33%	57%
9. Work with Students in a Classroom Setting		14%	33%	43%	67%	43%
10. A 10-hour Field Placement for Preservice Teacher*			17%	43%	50%	29%

*All ratings are reported in percentages and rounded off. For item numbers 3-7 at least one teacher did not respond and in numbers 8 and 10, two teachers did not respond. Thus, these numbers' percentages do not add up to 100.

**SS1 the abbreviation for supervising teachers' Survey I ratings in percentages.

***SS2 is the abbreviation for the supervising teachers' Survey II ratings in percentages.

****SOL is the acronym for the state's Standards of Learning curriculum requirements for public schools.

in two items, in writing lesson plans and objectives. However, three items of strength, one in lesson planning--SOL familiarity, instructional use of reading guides and working with students in a classroom setting, were identified in Survey 1 but went down to under a majority by Survey 2 respondents. Three items, vocabulary instruction, assessment of lessons and working with the textbook, went up in rankings when marked by a majority of teachers as strengths in Survey 2. Also, the item, working with an at-risk child changed from Survey 1 to Survey 2. Fewer teachers said this needed much or some work in Survey 2 as more teachers felt this area was a strength. As for the 10-hour field placement experience, more teachers felt the experience needed some work and fewer reported it as a strength in Survey 2. Thus, it seems that lesson plans, writing objectives, vocabulary instruction, working with the text and assessment were the strengths of the placement while state curriculum criteria, reading guides and working with students in a classroom setting are needs of preservice teachers in the field placement. Also, one teacher reported that working with an at-risk child is in much need. Overall, the needs much work category was marked in only three items in Survey 1 but in five for Survey 2. Thus, it seems that supervising teachers saw more extensive needs in the preservice teachers after working with them for a longer period of time.

CONCLUSIONS

When comparing and contrasting the preservice and supervising teachers' two surveys, several conclusions were formed. First, there were two comparisons:

- 1) Responding preservice and supervising teachers agreed that preservice teachers had strengths in writing lesson plans and objectives.
- 2) One or more preservice and supervising teachers agreed in both surveys an area of need may be in working with at-risk students. Thus, more work in this area prior to or during the placement may be warranted.

There were five contrasts found in the survey responses:

- 3) Preservice teachers felt they had more strengths and viewed the placement as positive while their supervising teachers thought the field placement needed some work to be effective and viewed the placement not as positive.
- 4) Preservice teachers were consistent in responses to both surveys while the supervising teachers had mixed responses on strengths of the placement.
- 5) Preservice teachers felt they needed more work to be effective in using their students' texts while the supervising teachers felt this was a strength.

- 6) Supervising teachers gave mixed responses in the strengths rating with a majority rating three areas as strengths in Survey 1 and a different three areas as strengths in Survey 2.
- 7) Preservice teachers indicate fewer areas of much need by the end of the placement than in the middle while supervising teachers indicated more areas of much need at the end of the placement than in the middle..

Two general conclusions were:

- 8) The number of participating supervising teachers was so limited in each survey, that one or up to five of the respondents in each survey may have been different. Thus, further study is suggested to follow-up on their results.
- 9) The study is a very limited study and cannot be applied to a larger population.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Though this study is limited to a small number of participants, the preservice teachers self-rated survey responses showed consistency in an overall positive view of their performance in the 10-hour field placement in content area reading courses. However, the supervising teachers participating in the two surveys gave mixed results on strengths and needs of the 10-hour field placement. Thus, follow-up implications for the instructor to implement in the next content area field placement are discussed.

- 1) Either delay the 10-hour field placement or extend the time to 10-weeks with one hour spent in a classroom with the same class each week. This will give the course instructor more in-class time to cover content area reading areas such as working with at-risk students and with a student's textbooks so that preservice teachers are better prepared to handle these areas in the field placement and feel more confidence in these areas..
- 2) Meet with the supervising teachers prior to the placement to review the placement program so they know more of what to expect of their preservice teachers throughout the placement. Since this placement is to be taken early in the teacher education program, supervising teachers need to be aware that preservice teachers will acquire more instructional knowledge as they work their way through the teacher education program's more advanced courses and field experiences.
- 3) A 10-hour survey may be too brief to conduct two surveys since teachers are very busy with much paper work. Thus, to encourage more survey participation of supervising teachers, conducting one survey at the end of the 10-hour placement to compare the program effectiveness results with this study's is suggested.

- 4) Track the responding supervising teachers' surveys and their content fields to get specific results to determine if some content areas seem to be more effective in the field placement. If there is a difference in the preservice teachers' effectiveness in different content areas, perhaps the course instructor will be able to alter the course to benefit the preservice teachers in content areas that are rated as less effective.
- 5) Share this study with both preservice and supervising teachers and with the partnership committee. Perhaps preservice teachers can receive texts for their use in lesson planning and teaching for the placement. Also, both supervising and preservice teachers will know their opinions on the surveys are important to the course instructor and will be seriously considered for the next placement so that preservice teachers are as prepared and effective as possible in the placement.

The surveys indicated that preservice teachers find the content area 10-hour field placement to be a valuable and positive experience for them as future teachers. If the conclusions and implications are applied to the next content area placement, the course instructor hopes that supervising teachers will respond more positively that the field placement is more of a benefit to their classes and to them as well as to the preservice teacher. Efforts and study to this end will continue!

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