

The impact of student teaching on discipline referrals in an urban Texas school district

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ABSTRACT

Teachers are entering the classroom with varying levels of training as various certification routes and programs responsible for training prospective teachers in the areas of curriculum, assessment, theory, pedagogy, and classroom management differ in their requirements or lack thereof. This study attempted to determine if there is a relationship between student teaching and the number of discipline referrals written by teachers. Additionally, teachers' level of education and years of teaching experience, age, race, and gender were also factored in to determine if a correlation existed between these factors and the number of discipline referrals written by teachers. The population for this study was the middle and high school teachers in one rural south central Texas school district. Data were collected from the school district's personnel database as well as from the campus level administrators. Hierarchical regressions were used to test null hypotheses and recommendations were suggested.

Keywords: Certification, Teacher education, Student Teaching, Discipline Referrals

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers vary in content area, age, ethnicity, years of experience, and other characteristics, including pre-service teacher training. Today, teacher certification programs are still seeking to establish equitable and effective standards and practices for the preparation of tomorrow's teachers especially as the level of teacher effectiveness directly determines the level of student academic gain (Horn, Sanders, & Wright, 1997).

One key component to traditional teacher certification programs is field-based experience. The idea that field-based experience is the best preparation for future teachers is a common theme amongst education experts. The importance field experiences play in teacher preparation has been stressed for decades (Capraro, Capraro, & Helfeldt, 2010).

However, prospective teachers can also choose non-traditional or alternative certification routes to achieve teaching certification, even though many do not offer comparable amounts of field based experience and others do not require any at all. Alternative certification programs were developed to alleviate teacher shortages by fast-tracking people into the world of education through expedited programs that often place prospective teachers into the classroom with little to no real classroom training (Heinen & Scribner, 2009, Jacobs & Walsh, 2007). Opponents of alternative certification programs argue that alternative certification programs often exclude necessary field-based experience.

One of the components of the field-based experience is practice with classroom management techniques. Effective classroom management techniques have a direct impact on student learning and achievement (Kariuki, 2009). The positive effects of adequately prepared teachers are seen in the levels of student achievement. Research by Buck and O' Brien (2005) indicated that increases in student achievement are based on increases in the classroom experience of a teacher. As a teacher's experience increases so too does their ability to do all aspects of their job including successful classroom management. Kariuki's (2009) research indicated that effective classroom management positively affected student learning and achievement. Oliver, Reschly, and Wehby (2011) affirmed this notion, stating that disruptive students experience less engaged instruction time, tend to have lower grades, and perform worse on standardized tests compared to students in classrooms with effective classroom management.

The research involved in this study attempted to determine whether the presence and absence of student teaching impacts classroom management as measured by discipline referrals while controlling for level of education, years of teaching experience, age, race, and gender at both middle and high school levels.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Becoming a Teacher

The Texas State Board of Educator Certification (S.B.E.C.) has outlined several requirements that each individual must complete before becoming a certified teacher. These requirements serve as a basic outline for certification in general. First, a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university is required with a specific academic major (2011). Subsequently, completion of an approved teacher training program is necessary (2011). Teacher certification programs are offered through colleges and universities, school districts, regional service centers, community colleges, and alternative certification programs. The appropriate

teacher certification test for each subject and grade level that is to be taught must be passed (2011). The Texas Education Agency (T.E.A.) has established the two final steps a person must complete for teaching certification. First, a person must complete and submit the appropriate application and fees which are then filed with S.B.E.C. Secondly, all first time teachers in the state of Texas must submit to fingerprinting as part of a national criminal background check (2010).

Classroom Management

In today's classrooms, classroom management is one of the primary areas of concern for teachers (Martin, Mayall, & Yin, 2006). Effective classroom management involves designing and implementing efficient classroom routines, policies, and procedures for participation in class discussions, forming cooperative learning groups, accomplishing class assignments, and various other classroom activities and interactions (Sterling, 2009). Student discipline and classroom management are part of the everyday role of the teacher. Putnam (2009) explains how classroom management plays a significant role in a teacher's ability to conduct daily instruction successfully. Curwin and Mendler (2008) state, the primary responsibility of the teacher should be effective classroom management. Research indicates that effective classroom management directly affects student achievement (Kariuki, 2009). Student achievement is impacted by student behavior, yet the most common requests for assistance from teachers are related to classroom management. Students in poorly managed classrooms experience less engaged instruction time, tend to have lower grades, and perform worse on standardized tests (Oliver, Reschly, & Wehby, 2011). Kaufman and Moss (2010) noted that often upon entering the profession, teachers feel they must establish classroom control through the enforcement of rules. With proper classroom management, teachers of all grade levels, and thus students, can be successful.

Pre-Service field based experience

One of the more controversial topics in education today is the hiring of teachers who were certified through certification programs which did not require field-experience or student teaching. In many certification programs, teachers can enter the classroom as a full time staff member without ever having been trained in an actual classroom setting. For decades, individuals such as Dewey (1965) and Barth (2001), and professional groups such as the Carnegie Forum on Education (1986) and The Holmes Group (1986), have stressed the importance of field experiences in teacher preparation (Capraro, Capraro, & Helfeldt, 2010). While the field experience, in any program, may not be exhaustive, teacher preparation programs recognize the importance of having intensive field experiences involving reflection and inquiry that link theories with personal learning experiences (Capraro, Capraro, & Helfeldt, 2010). Practical hands-on experience is important for effective learning (McArdle, 2010).

Proponents of certification programs requiring field based experience argue that the field based aspect of the programs allow teachers to experience more successes and fewer challenges upon entering the teaching world. Student teaching should last no less than ten weeks and should include no less than five weeks at a single school (Greenberg, Pomerance, & Walsh, 2011). Many programs which do not require field experience do offer continuous professional development and support for first year teachers, which is considered by some to be more

beneficial than a semester of classroom experience with no follow up support or extension (NCEI, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

The data in this study were provided by a rural south central Texas school district. Specifically, data were compiled through the district personnel database as well as the discipline referral data kept by each campus. All collected data were numerical in nature; the methodology of the study was quantitative.

The data on student teaching and discipline referrals were collected through the school district's personnel office at the campus level. Additionally, the teacher demographic data were collected through the school district's personnel coordinator. The data were then compiled into an SPSS data files.

Middle school and high school teachers from a rural south central Texas school district served as the population for this study. The district personnel database provided teacher demographic information including age, gender, ethnicity, years of experience, years on current assignment, and route to certification. The teacher demographic data served as covariates to equate differences between the groups. The discipline data for each teacher were collected by campus. Discipline data on each campus were categorized by the infraction and by the teacher that issued the referral. Each teacher was coded to remove identities and ensure confidentiality. The researchers were the only persons that had access to the identification of the research subjects. SPSS, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 20.0, was the electronic data analysis tool used.

For this study, the researchers used a hierarchical regression to analyze the data. To run the hierarchical regression the researchers input the dependent variable, classroom management as measured by discipline referrals, and then input the block of independent variables: level of education, years of teaching experience, age, race, and gender for the middle school and high school to account for the variance due to these variables. The remaining independent variable of the presence or absence of student teaching in alternative certification was then added to discover how much variance this variable accounted for beyond the initial block of variables. Standard statistical limits and an alpha level of .05 were set for this hierarchical regression. The hierarchical regression was run first for middle school teachers and then the study was replicated utilizing only high school teachers.

RESULTS

In this study, 49 middle school teachers were analyzed. The demographic information for this sample is listed in Table 1 (Appendix). Overall, an average of 5.27 discipline referrals were written; participants with student teaching completed an average of 4.96 referrals and those with no student teaching completed an average of 5.34 referrals, as noted in Table 2 (Appendix).

Model 1 represents entry of the demographic variables of degree, age, gender, ethnicity, and years of experience, and Model 2 represents entry of the variable of student teaching in Table 3 (Appendix). The results show that Model 1 (demographics) accounted for 8.3% of the variance in the participants' discipline referrals. Entry of the student teaching variable (Model 2) resulted in an R Squared change of .000, thus entry of the certification variable did not increase the explained variance in the participants' discipline referrals. This change was not significant as

evidenced by the F Change test, $F(1, 42) = .02, p = .90$. The results suggest that there was no significant difference between student teaching ($M = 4.96, SD = 5.00$) and no student teaching ($M = 5.34, SD = 6.94$) on the number of discipline referrals that were written.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) represented by Table 4 (Appendix) shows that entry of the set of demographic variables alone (Model 1) yielded an insignificant prediction equation, $F(5, 43) = .78, p = .57$. Addition of the student teaching variable (Model 2) resulted in an overall insignificant equation, $F(6, 42) = .64, p = .70$, this resulted in no significant difference in the number of discipline referrals that were written. Model 2 suggests that there are no issues with multi-collinearity as all tolerance values are above .10; all VIF values were below 10.

For this study, 39 high school teachers were also analyzed. Demographic information for this sample is listed in Table 5 (Appendix). Overall, an average of 4.92 discipline referrals were written; participants with student teaching completed an average of 3.82 referrals and those with no student teaching completed an average of 5.36 referrals, shown in Table 6 (Appendix).

Model 1 represents entry of the demographic variables of degree, age, gender, ethnicity, and years of experience, and Model 2 represents entry of the variable of certification in Table 7 (Appendix). The results show that Model 1 (demographics) accounted for 7.3% of the variance in the subjects' discipline referrals. Entry of the student teaching variable (Model 2) resulted in an R Squared change of .021, thus entry of the certification variable increased the explained variance in the subjects discipline referrals by 2.1% to a total of 9.4%. This increase was not significant as evidenced by the F Change test, $F(1, 32) = .73, p = .40$. The results suggest that when adding the variable of certification (Model 2) to the demographic variables (Model 1), there was no significant effect on the number of discipline referrals that were written.

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) represented by Table 8 (Appendix) shows that entry of the set of demographic variables alone (Model 1) yielded an insignificant prediction equation, $F(5, 33) = .52, p = .76$. Addition of the certification variable (Model 2) resulted in an overall insignificant equation, $F(6, 32) = .55, p = .77$. This resulted in no significant difference in the number of discipline referrals that were written between the traditional route ($M = 3.82, SD = 4.90$) and the alternative route ($M = 5.36, SD = 8.42$). Model 2 suggests that there are no issues with multi-collinearity as all tolerance values are above .10; all VIF values were below 10.

In terms of the overall effect of all variables involved in this study, the results of the analysis demonstrated that there was no significant effect on classroom management as measured by the number of discipline referrals written. Specifically, the number of discipline referrals written was not significantly affected by the presence or absence of student teaching.

CONCLUSIONS

The debate over the preparation of future teachers is one that has emerged in recent history with the increase in popularity and numbers of teacher certification programs. Proponents of non-field experience certification programs contend that these programs allow teachers to enter the teaching profession in an expedited manner and do a sufficient job of providing adequate preparation. Opponents of these certification programs argue that the lack of field-based experience or student teaching hinders a prospective teacher's ability to manage a classroom which in turn has negative impacts on student achievement. Proponents of student teaching contend that it provides prospective teachers with a more adequate background into the

world of education as well as allowing them to be better prepared upon entering the classroom as a beginning teacher.

This study sought to examine the differences in the number of discipline referrals written and whether those numbers were affected by the presence or absence of student teaching in the teacher certification program. Secondary teachers at three high school and five middle schools in one south central Texas school district were selected as the focus of this study.

In summary, examining the effects of the presence or absence of student teaching on the number of discipline referrals written by secondary teachers in a rural south central Texas school district found that there were no significant differences or effects. The results of this study yielded no proof that the presence or absence of student teaching had a significant effect on classroom management as measured by discipline referrals. The researchers make the conclusion that the fact that there are no significant differences between the presence and absence of student teaching is the result of the effects of all other variables such as age and years of experience. For administrators and human resource personnel, the results of this study suggest that hiring practices should not attempt to avoid teachers with no student teaching experience as there is no significant difference in the ability to manage a classroom. Additional research should be done to determine effects of student teaching on student achievement and teacher retention.

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