Does Teaching Methods Instruction Inform Beginning Inservice Teachers’ Practice?

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Initiative Strand Addressed: #7. Professional development for pre-service and practicing teachers

Rationale

To prepare teachers as agents for change in our nation’s schools, researchers must first understand the motivation and beliefs of preservice and beginning teachers (Pajares, 1992; Stuart & Thurlow, 2000). Teacher preparation programs cannot afford to ignore the beliefs (Pajares, 1992) and resulting practice (Simmons et. al., 1999) of entering beginning teachers. Beginning teacher beliefs and instructional decisions are influenced by their diverse and multiple life experiences. Intensive student teaching internships, and field experiences are widely used, both in the United States and other countries (Floden, 2001) to facilitate teachers’ learning of instructional skills. The effects of university teaching methods courses and field experiences have been documented, but vary in their conclusive evidence. For example, Jones and Vesilind (1996) found that the influence of university courses was overturned by the influence of interactions with the preservice teachers’ students, while Hill (2000) found that experience alone does not lead inevitably to learning, nor to improved practice of beginning teachers. In addition to the multiplicity of conclusions concerning preservice teacher field experiences, Floden (2001) documented in his chapter of the fourth edition of the Handbook of Research on Teaching that little research has addressed how entire programs of teacher education affect teacher education planning and implementation. This study strives to add to this particular body of knowledge.

Purpose/Objectives

The purpose of the study is to describe 28 beginning teachers’ utility of learner-centered teaching methods during their first semester of inservice teaching experience. This study is a continuation of a longitudinal study following a cohort of career and technical education teachers from their teaching methods course through their student teaching internship and first semester of inservice practice. The specific objectives of this study is to: (1) explore beginning teachers’ reflections of their teaching experiences in high school classrooms; (2) describe beginning teachers’ understandings of teaching methods as they apply to student learning outcomes; and, (3) understand reasons why beginning teachers’ chose the teaching methods they used during inservice teaching following teacher preparation instruction in learner-centered teaching methods. The population of this study is three cohorts of beginning teachers who participated in the teaching methods and student teaching cohorts in agricultural education at the University of Illinois (2002-03 cohort = 13 third-year teachers; 2003-04 cohort = 7 second-year teachers; 2004-05 = 8 first-year teachers). Personal interviews and a questionnaire will be conducted to understand the professional development needs of these beginning teachers. The researchers are particularly interested in knowing if the beginning teachers understand the influence of teaching methods on students learning outcomes and if they use learner-centered teaching methods they were taught in their teaching methods course.
Improve and positively impact CTE in Illinois

Beginning teachers in career and technical education need professional development and support to help them be successful teachers. This research program seeks to improve and positively impact CTE in Illinois in two ways: (1) Interacting with beginning teachers to engage in reflecting on their teaching practice and how it influences student learning; and, (2) identifying professional development needs focused on teaching practices and how teaching impacts student learning. This program specifically seeks to impact CTE in Illinois by continuing the relationship between teacher education and beginning teachers to understand their needs to improve pre-service teacher development, and develop reflective practitioners who engage students through learner-centered teaching methods. We believe that disseminating the impacts (or barriers of adoption) of a learner-centered undergraduate/graduate teaching methods class on the inservice practice of beginning agriculture teachers through a professional conference and a peer-reviewed research journal will assist teacher educators, school administrators, and cooperating teachers to better prepare new teachers for future challenges regarding diversity and cultural pluralism. This study strives to better understand and appreciate the diverse needs and talents of all students thereby creating an enhanced curriculum to better serve the professional development needs of preservice and inservice career and technical teachers in Illinois.

Deliverable Products

We plan to deliver three products: (1) summary report; (2) conference paper; and a (3) journal article. A final summary report will be written to evaluate the research procedures, summarize the findings, and recommend action for improving practice and further research. Interviews will be used to assess beginning inservice agriculture teachers’ perceptions of how the learner-centered teacher preparation program impacted their development and success as a young agricultural education professional. Implications of the findings will be assessed regarding further research, curriculum and program development, and professional development for preservice teachers. We hope a new model will emerge from the findings to assist teacher educators to better train new professionals for the new era of career and technical education. This new model for CTE preservice teacher training will be substantiated by documenting how inservice teachers translate their teacher education programs into real-world practice. In addition, we plan to share the research findings at the 2006 Connections Conference in Springfield. Additionally, the authors plan to submit proposals from the research project to regional and national conferences. Ultimately, we would like to make our findings part of the permanent knowledge base in CTE by publishing the study in Career and Technical Education Research.

Partnerships with Illinois Public Schools

All of the participants in this study teach agriculture in Illinois public schools. The focus of this study is on 28 teachers, yet we hope that improving teaching in the high school classrooms will potentially impact learning for over 2600 students, annually. Moreover, the researchers will collaborate with the Illinois State Board of Education Career and Technical Education Consultant for Agricultural Education and the Director of Facilitating Coordination of Agricultural Education. This project cannot be successfully conducted without the partnership
with the local public schools and the state administrators in CTE who coordinate efforts among the local public schools in Illinois. The results of this study will also be used to help enhance the pre-service teachers’ student teaching experiences in Illinois public high schools.

References


