Chapter 14

Exploring the Preparedness of Business Education Teacher Candidates for their Internships:
The Perspectives of Mentor Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Applying a modified-Delphi technique, this research study sought consensus from business education mentor teachers regarding the top three areas in which business education student teachers were prepared as well as underprepared for their roles as teachers. Further, the mentor teachers provided recommendations for business education teacher preparation programs to implement to better prepare their teacher candidates for the student teaching internship. To that end, the mentor teachers did not gain consensus on the top three areas their student teachers were most prepared. However, they did agree classroom management and working with special needs' students were among the top three areas their student teachers were least prepared. The mentor teachers agreed business education teacher preparation programs could provide more experiences with classroom management in public schools and provide their teacher candidates with more information about the workload and commitment needed to be effective teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The student teaching internship is the final preparatory experience, and has been cited as the most vital, exciting, and problematic time for teacher candidates (Conderman, Morin, & Stephens, 2005; Fives, Hamman, & Olivarez, 2007; Grossman, Schoenfeld, & Lee, 2005; Pena & Almaguer, 2007). Moreover, the result of the experience is one of the best indicators predicting teacher candidates' likelihood to pursue a teaching career (Conderman et al., 2005). To better prepare teacher candidates for their internships, it is critical to understand the issues and challenges which occur throughout their student teaching experiences.

The majority of studies investigating the student teaching experience have examined the perspectives of student teachers in terms of their issues and challenges (Fletcher, Mountjoy, & Bailey, in press); however, little research has investigated the perspectives of their mentor teachers (commonly referred to as cooperating teachers Crews & Bodenhamer, 2009). Furthermore, very little research has been conducted examining the possible unique issues of business education student teachers (Fletcher et al., in press). Instead, the research which has ensued on this topic has largely left out the business education discipline.

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To that end, the purpose of this research study was to explore the perspectives of mentor teachers regarding issues, challenges, and barriers they encountered when mentoring their student teachers. More specifically, this study examined which areas business education student teachers were prepared as well as underprepared for their roles as teachers as well as initiatives business education teacher preparation programs could implement to better prepare their teacher candidates for the student teaching internship. The research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. What are the top three areas which mentor teachers believed their student teachers were most prepared?
2. What are the top three areas which mentor teachers believed their student teachers were least prepared?
3. What initiatives might business teacher preparation programs implement to better prepare their student teachers?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The two most important considerations in individuals' abilities to successfully develop competencies include the process of learning and the transfer of learning (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999). Learning experiences which support transfer include, but are not limited to, the following: (a) the mastery of foundational concepts which are germane to the subject; (b) the focus on understanding instead of mere memorization; (c) an adequate investment of time to gain sufficient knowledge; (d) the level of engagement in intentional practice with continuous monitoring and feedback; and, (e) the context in which the initial learning takes place: "people can learn in one context, yet fail to transfer to other contexts" (Bransford et al., 1999). All of these factors are perennial challenges for teacher preparation programs. In the context of teacher preparation, the ability of teacher candidates to transfer and apply knowledge gained from coursework and prior field experiences to clinical practice is oftentimes a difficult and problematic process. As such, this puts a lot of pressure and dependence on the triad relationship (university supervisor, mentor teacher, and student teacher), in clinical practice, in terms of developing teacher candidates and helping them bridge the gap between theory and practice.

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