

## **The Missing Piece in Teacher Preparation Programs: Leadership Education**

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### **Abstract**

*Educational leadership is commonly overlooked in undergraduate teacher preparation programs. This study examines the role of leadership education in preparing beginning teachers for a successful student teaching experience. Successful student teaching experiences are key to developing future teachers and keeping effective teachers in the classroom. This case study enabled researchers to examine the student teaching experience from the viewpoint of students and observers to understand the impact of the experience in relation to leadership. The researchers found leadership traits described by participants closely related to high self-efficacy and professionalism characteristics, which are predictors for successful beginning teachers. Including leadership in teacher preparation programs can develop and prepare new teachers for a successful beginning experience, therefore lowering teacher attrition.*

**Key Words:** pre-service, teachers, leadership, education, attrition, self-efficacy, professionalism, teacher-preparation

Beginning teachers are prepared with content and pedagogy knowledge but are lacking a key element, leadership education, to go from being good teachers to great teachers that remain in the field of education. Research details a need for teacher leadership to equip educators to be effective change agents for school improvement, policy changes, and legislation (Dozier, 2007; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009). However, there is a lack in research regarding the need for leadership in undergraduate preparation programs for personal development. According to the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, teacher leadership involves three facets, which include individual development, collaboration, and organizational development (2005). The focus of this research is on the individual development of leadership in teacher preparation programs. Starting teachers' competence is a focal point both nationally and internationally (Huntly, 2008). The teaching profession is often associated with a high level of attrition (Sass, Bustos Flores, Claeys, & Pérez, 2008). A concerning number of 40-50% of beginning teachers leave the profession (Mee & Haverback, 2014) within the first five years of teaching (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Our world faces a problem in our school systems with high turnover, which has a negative impact on student learning (Wiens & Ruday, 2014). Leaders in the field of education frequently search for solutions to reduce high attrition rates. Ideally, the problem should be addressed during undergraduate training. Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) professed there is a need for more research in all areas of teacher preparation.

A few known reasons for beginning teachers leaving the field of education include low self-efficacy, (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2011) and lack of professionalism (Bigham et al., 2014). Pre-service teachers need more than content and pedagogical knowledge in preparation for assuming responsibility for all aspects of a classroom.

The purpose of this study is to focus on how to best prepare teachers before clinical practice, also known as the student teaching experience, to become effective teacher leaders, improve student success, and remain in the field of education. The aim is to identify attributes of successful student teacher characteristics and improve the teacher candidate preparation by identifying additional programmatic opportunities and preparation through leadership training. Rots and Aelterman (2008) emphasized the quality of the initial teaching experience is a contributing factor to beginning teacher attrition. With attrition among teaching professionals being especially high among beginners (Rots & Aelterman, 2008), the student teaching experience and preparation is an essential element for consideration and the basis for this study.

## 1.1 Leadership

Leadership in the PK-12 school systems has been present for over two decades, remains an important factor, and is increasing in awareness around the world (Bond & Hargreaves, 2015). However, teacher leadership remains largely absent in undergraduate teacher preparation. Leading nations, such as Finland and Singapore have made this connection and place a priority in developing effective teachers through professional development, including leadership training (Berry & Byrd, 2013). Leadership training for personal development can increase teacher self-efficacy and professionalism (Berry & Byrd, 2013). Research points to effective leadership characteristics in teachers who have a successful teaching experience (Platt, 2002). Teacher leadership has been present but lacks depth in personal development. Teachers assume leadership roles that are limited in scope and merely serve as representatives on committees or associations (Boyd-Dimock & McGree, 1995). There is a need for leadership education as leadership characteristics are a predictor of successful student teaching. Leadership traits and skills can be either innate or learned. Mazzoni and Watzlaf (1989) stated implementing leadership skills is critical to teachers' responsibility for increasing student knowledge and creating effective learning environments.

## 1.2 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy or being self-aware is an important trait in beginning teachers. Self-efficacy or the belief in one's worth as an educator to be successful and meet goals when faced with challenges is a known predictor to teacher effectiveness (Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2011). "A teacher with strong beliefs in his or her own efficacy will be resilient, able to solve problems and, most importantly, learn from their experience" (Bangs & Frost, 2012, p.3). The level of self-efficacy has a positive relationship with outcomes used to measure teacher success (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Rockoff et al. (2011) found a correlation between self-efficacy and growth of students' achievements. Self-efficacy is a key element in leadership education (McCormick, Tanguma, Lopez-Forment, 2002). McCormick et al. (2002) concluded self-efficacy affects job performance and is typically lower in the female population. Transformational leadership, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, and charismatic leadership are just a few leadership areas of study that include self-efficacy, which can be included in teacher preparation programs. While teacher candidate preparation is vitally important, there are situations and expectations that professors are unable to teach or provide student experiences until in the job. An integral piece of being self-aware is that new teachers are human and do not have the answer to every problem that arises (Huntly, 2008). Teachers need the confidence to solve problems and handle unfamiliar situations with high self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, introduced by Bandura (1997), affects teacher's task-oriented coping mechanisms, persistence, and individual effort. Leadership education can change self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Taking this a step further, providing leadership education and experience has the potential to increase teachers sense of self-efficacy and commitment to the profession.

## 1.3 Professionalism

"Advocacy for teacher professionalism and expanded leadership roles is based on the understanding that teachers, because they have daily contacts with learners, are in the best position to make critical decisions about curriculum and instruction" (Boyd-Dimock & McGree, 1995, p. 1). Beginning teachers who demonstrate professionalism characteristics including a strong work ethic, positive attitude, passion for teaching, and an open-mindedness to learn were most impactful to successful beginning teaching experiences (Bigham et al., 2014). The teaching field has experienced a slow movement toward professionalism. Some reasons for this slow movement include but are not limited to administration, lack of time to collaborate, and the need to learn how to lead (Berry & Byrd, 2013). In a study by Bigham et al. (2014), principals and cooperating teachers who supervise student teachers ranked attitude high in qualities of a successful teacher. "Many principals in the current study stated that non-curricular aspects of teacher preparation may be more important than curriculum and pedagogy: 'Attitude is everything. Everything else can be learned'" (Bigham et al., 2014, p. 227).

## 1.4 Summary

Adequately preparing undergraduates for the realities of the beginning teaching experience can have a positive effect on teacher attrition. More importantly, adequate preparation can affect teacher effectiveness and learner success. To best prepare pre-service teachers, researchers explored the literature on attributes of leadership, self-efficacy, and professionalism.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Research Method and Design**

Student perceptions in a 14-week student teaching experience were collected using a case study method. The case study method included gathering qualitative data, from multiple sources, to understand a group. Triangulation was utilized with four points of data and multiple observers. Data was collected over a one-year period to determine themes while a deeper understanding of the student teaching experience was explored. The purpose of this study was to identify attributes of student teachers and improve the teacher candidate preparation by identifying additional programmatic opportunities and preparation.

### **2.2 Participants**

The survey population consisted of 41 student teachers at a private liberal arts institution who were finishing their student teaching experience or had finished the previous term. Thirty-two of the 41 student teachers responded to the survey resulting in a 78% response rate. Demographic data was obtained through surveys and records at the college. All participants were traditional students ranging from 21 to 22 years of age. Seven of the respondents were male and 25 were female resulting in 22% male and 78% female participants. The ethnicity of the participants was mainly white with 97% white/Caucasian and 3% Asian or Pacific Islander. Over half or 55% of the participants were Elementary Education majors with 26% in Secondary Education and 19% in Music/Music Therapy Education. The most frequent endorsements in this population included reading, math, science, and special education.

### **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

The description of conceptual models offer insight and aim to provide a deeper understanding of the learning and formation of knowledge during student teaching. The key theoretical models used during student teaching include cognitive and behavioral models. Cognitive learning theories focus on the attainment of knowledge and skill sets, mental structures, and processing information (Schunk, 2004). Behavioral learning theories involve stimuli and responses to the surrounding environment (Schunk, 2004). Through the constructivist learning theory, a cognitive learning theory, students actively constructed knowledge based on current and past knowledge (Tennyson & Rasch, 1988). Constructivism focuses on each unique experience (Crotty, 1998). Students were encouraged to go further than information presented through transforming information, constructing hypotheses, making decisions, and using cognitive structures or schemas (Kearsley, 1994). Student teaching provided an environment rich for the constructivist theory based on teaching experiences and problems encountered in the classroom (Bigham, Hively, & Toole, 2014). Thorndike's behavioral theory centers on the mental process and self-directed or voluntary behaviors and includes laws of learning (Gredler, 2005). Students engaged in the law of exercise, which encourages repetition for mastery (Gredler, 2005). Students interacted with their environment during student teaching and responded accordingly to move toward mastery.

### **2.4 Research Site**

The institution, where the study took place, is a four-year, liberal arts, residential, private college located in the Midwest. Students are offered a diverse campus atmosphere that is committed to self-improvement and aiding each student in finding their unique calling. The institution's Education Department is the third largest major. The Education Department is nationally accredited.

### **2.5 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality in research studies is essential (Creswell, 2005) and was an important deliberation. Participant identities remained anonymous through coding. For instance, Participant 1 received a letter and number combination such as P1 to represent Participant 1. The coding system ensures participant identities remain unnamed. During the analysis of data, the coded identifier took the place of names or any personally identifying information.

### **2.6 Data Collection**

Researchers collected data using four sources and multiple observers. The rich data gave researchers the opportunity to gain insight to the student teaching experience. The following subsections describe the data collection process.

### 2.6.1 Likert-scale survey

Collection of Likert-scale surveys occurred at the end of the spring term. The survey consisted of 16 questions, which asked students to respond by choosing from a range of options, such as strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree.

### 2.6.2 Open-ended survey

Students answered open-ended questions in an on-line format. The survey contained 15 open-ended questions. The researcher sorted responses and phrases by relevant themes.

### 2.6.3 Observations

Faculty supervisors observed all students seven times throughout the 14-week student teaching experience. Observations ranged from 45 minutes to an hour by a full-time faculty. Faculty filed and shared documentation of each observation with the student teacher. Brief meetings took place after each observation with the student and faculty to document the observations, concerns, successes, and suggestions for improvement.

### 2.6.4 Informal interviews

The researchers conducted several informal interviews with administrators, faculty, cooperating teachers, and staff. The meetings were often a half hour in length and notes were taken in a journal to record information. Interviews were analyzed by theming consistent topics.

## 2.7 Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis breaks the data into themes and sections, as data is not capable of speaking to the audience (Schwandt, 2001). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) described concept bracketing; employing the following steps, which is designed to analyze the data for common ideas:

1. Look for key phrases and statements that link directly to the concepts in question.
2. Interpret the meanings.
3. Inspect the meanings for what they reveal or tell about the theme.
4. Offer a tentative statement or definition of the theme.

Once the data were collected, the research was categorized, grouped, and clustered in order to make meaning of the data. "The researcher uses constant comparative analysis to look for statements and indices of behavior that occur over time and in a variety of periods during the study" (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 390). Analysis began with the process of organizing and reducing the initial data. Conclusions and interpretations were developed through establishing a pattern of ideas throughout the responses.

### 2.11 Summary

Application of the qualitative paradigm assisted in making meaning of the unique experience in student teaching. This research design answered questions about the human experience in student teaching. Data were collected through a year using Likert scales, open-ended questions, observations, and interviews along with multiple observers. Bracketing established themes in the data.

## 3. Results

Participants responded to a series of questions in relation to their student teaching experience. The questions included motivation or desire to student teach, difficulty or ease of the experience, open reflection on each of the seven week placements, events that were surprising, resources that were helpful, and areas needing more preparation. Participants also responded to what areas they felt prepared in student teaching. Out of the respondents, 72% marked very high for their motivation or desire to student teach with 9% having high motivation, 16% with average motivation and 3% with little motivation. None of the participants marked very little motivation. Overall, the majority of participants had very high or high motivation to start teaching. With 81% of respondents responding with very high or high motivation to start student teaching, it should be determined why 40-50% of beginning teachers will leave the profession.

When asked about the ease or difficulty of student teaching, 3% answered the experience was easy and 53% responded the experience was about right. However, 38% felt the experience was difficult and 6% replied it was very difficult. Faculty, cooperating teachers, administration, and staff observed a high motivation for student teaching and desire to succeed.

### **3.1 Leadership**

Leadership is not commonly included in teacher education programs. However, leadership skills are present in teachers who display professional behavior and self-efficacy. Leadership can be seen every day in the classroom. Study participants felt prepared in leadership with 87% specifying either prepared or very prepared and 13% indicating adequately prepared. Observers of student teachers noted the need for increased leadership in the classroom, which included self-efficacy. Out of the respondents, only 5% had formal leadership training.

When asking participants to define leadership, students responded with demonstrating good character and respect (41%), being a role model or mentor (36%), showing initiative (32%), and empowering others to reach goals (18%). One to three respondents listed effective classroom management, professionalism, goal-driven decisions, communication, and collaborating with colleagues as attributes associated with leadership. A respondent stated, "Leadership can be defined in many ways, but I mainly think of a leader as a role-model who leads by example. Leaders display the pillars of character counts, especially respect. They empower students to reach all that they are capable of. They are committed to making sure students reach their goals."

### **3.2 Self-efficacy and professionalism as teacher leaders**

Literature often refers to self-efficacy as a predictor of teacher effectiveness (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Pre-service teachers described confidence levels at the start of the student teaching experience with 52% feeling confidence was lacking at the start of the experience. One pre-service teacher stated, "My second placement was definitely much more challenging than the first. It was more difficult to communicate with my cooperating teacher, tougher to build relationships with the students, and curriculum that was much different than I had taught before". While approximately half of the participants noted feeling unconfident going in, 26% commented on feeling confident. Observers noted the lack of self-efficacy in beginning student teachers. Observers also noted self-efficacy improved with knowledge, practice, and experience. One participant mentioned, "I felt very prepared; I had the knowledge, and student teaching has provided the practice". Another respondent stated, "I think the education courses I have taken have given me both breadth and depth of knowledge about education, classroom management, and working with other educators/parents". Professionalism is a key discussion point and consideration in teacher leadership (Danielson, 2007). Students in this study were asked how prepared they felt in professionalism from undergraduate training. A large majority, 87%, felt very prepared while only 13% felt prepared or adequately prepared. However, when respondents described professionalism in their own words, the majority of responses included physical versus cognitive attributes. Cognitive attributes include a strong work ethic, positive attitudes, a passion for teaching, or life-long learning (Bigham et al., 2014). Fifty-seven percent of the responses, the highest percentage, described professionalism as appearance. The second-largest category was acting suitably through appropriate mannerisms and being polite at 43%. Having a strong work ethic was much lower at 17%. Only three respondents or 13% described professionalism as having a positive attitude. Similar to professionalism, participants reflected on self-efficacy at a surface level.

### **3. Discussion**

Leadership education is not common in teacher preparation programs (Danielson, 2007). Teacher leadership is needed in undergraduate work (Danielson, 2007). Teacher leadership includes self-efficacy and professionalism for personal development. Participants and observers agreed on low self-efficacy at the start of student teaching. Self-efficacy is a critical trait to be successful and accomplish tasks when solving problems, learning from experiences, and rising above daily challenges. With self-efficacy affecting job performance and lower in female populations (McCormick et al., 2002), teacher preparation programs should include leadership components to provide theoretical models and experiences to increase self-efficacy. With increased knowledge and leadership experiences, self-efficacy can reach a higher level in beginning teachers (McCormick et al., 2002), which reduces the attrition rate (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2011). Future teachers in this study felt confident in leadership but lacked a deep understanding of professionalism. Leadership education with a professionalism thread is needed in teacher preparation programs to gain a deep understanding of professionalism and grow in personal development. Professionalism in leadership education will facilitate development of pre-service teachers to cognitive attributes such as a strong work ethics, positive attitude, passion for the field, and life-long learning. Incorporating leadership in teacher preparation programs has the potential to facilitate success and reduce teacher attrition. As new teachers enter the field, the components included in teacher preparation programs affect experiences and effectiveness (The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2005).

The high level of teacher attrition in the first five years of service point to the need for programmatic changes in teacher preparation programs. With low self-efficacy and a lack of professionalism being known reasons for beginning teachers to leave the field of education, including professionalism and self-efficacy in leadership education is a solution to increase cognitive awareness and beginning teacher success while reducing teacher attrition.

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