

## PARTNERSHIPS IN PRESERVICE EDUCATION: PERCEPTIONS OF ASSOCIATE TEACHERS AND STUDENT TEACHERS

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**ABSTRACT.** The purpose of this study is to describe the differences in perceptions between associate teachers and student teachers in regard to a post-degree, one-year, school-based teacher education program, based on the responses to similar questionnaires given to associate teachers and student teachers. There were differences in perceptions between the two groups in the following areas: benefits to pupils, benefits to student teachers, benefits to associate teachers, benefits for the school, and negative elements for pupils. Some of these differences may be attributed to stages in one's career and the quality of the relationships between the associate teacher and the student teacher.

**RÉSUMÉ.** Cette étude décrit les différences de perception relevées dans les réponses fournies par des professeurs auxiliaires et des professeurs stagiaires à un questionnaire similaire portant sur un programme complémentaire de formation des maîtres d'une durée d'un an offert en milieu scolaire. Ces différences de perception avaient trait aux éléments suivants: utilité du programme pour les élèves, pour les professeurs stagiaires, pour les professeurs auxiliaires et pour l'école, et inconvénients pour les élèves. Certaines des différences observées pourraient être attribuables au stade de la carrière et à la qualité des relations établies entre le professeur auxiliaire et le professeur stagiaire.

**R**ecent reform in teacher education programs in Britain, and in North America, has taken a school-based approach. In Britain responsibility for initial teacher training has been devolved from the universities to the schools. However, Hannan (1995) reports little support for this model of preservice education on the following grounds: insufficient funding and lack of teacher expertise and time to provide a teacher education program rooted in theory and linked with classroom practice. A study conducted by Poppleton and Pullin (1992) reported similar findings as well as the concern among teachers that the transfer of initial teacher training from the universities to the schools is the first step in the deprofessionalizing of teaching.

In North America restructuring of teacher education is linked to school reform and the professionalization of teachers. Reform in preservice education is structured on the establishment of the Professional Development School (PDS). Lieberman and Miller (1990) describe the agenda of the PDS: (1) to provide a context for reforming educational practices, (2) to contribute to the preservice education of teachers and to induct them into the teaching profession, and (3) to provide for continuing development and professional growth of experienced teachers. In a PDS, practitioners and professors work in partnership to implement this agenda for joint-renewal. What distinguishes the PDS movement from other models of reform is that it focuses on teacher preparation as a vehicle for restructuring (Ross, 1995).

In the United States a number of PDSs have been established on the basis of a partnership between the faculties and the schools. Darling Hammond (1990) provides a rich source of case studies on some of these PDSs. In Canada one model of a PDS involves university-based programs with value-added practice. Student teachers are urged to participate in the life of the school and teachers are encouraged to become involved in thoughtful discussions about teaching and learning (McNay & Cole, 1992; Duquette & Cook, 1994).

Another approach to professional development schools in Canada is the school-based teacher education program offered at the University of Ottawa in which the Faculty of Education collaborates with local schools in the delivery of a one-year preservice program. The program involves approximately 60 student teachers and an equal number of associate teachers in up to 30 schools. Pairs of student teachers work with teachers in their assigned schools, spending about 80% of their preservice year in the classroom. The theory is given during seminars, workshops, and lectures. Faculty advisors and associate teachers assist the students in linking the theory with on-going practice. Graduates of this program have an understanding of theory, and are skilled in classroom practice.

The results of the studies done on the elementary school-based program revealed, among other things, differences in the perceptions of associate teachers and student teachers. In a study done by MacDonald, McKinnon, Joyce, and Gurney (1992), it was found that associate teachers and student teachers perceived different institutional constraints as important. For teachers the lack of time to meet with students was a problem. The most important institutional constraint for

student teachers was their minimal role in effecting change in schools. Interestingly, for student teachers the need to clarify and standardize the role of their associate teachers was critical. However, associate teachers did not report a need for clarification on this matter.

In another study of the elementary on-site program, differences in perceptions between teachers and student teachers were also noted (Duquette, 1993). The two groups were asked to respond to a questionnaire about the program, which was based on Rogers' (1983) five characteristics and eleven dimensions of an innovation. For associate teachers the social prestige of being involved in the first year of implementation of this innovative program was significant. However, for student teachers the convenience of being in one school was important. Interestingly, some students expressed concerns about their relationship with their teacher, which they felt were mainly due to poorly defined roles for associates. However, not one teacher reported that the relationship with the student was a problem.

The study reported in this article also involves the perceptions of associate teachers and student teachers involved in a school-based program (on-site program), but this study was conducted at the secondary level, rather than at the elementary level. The secondary program is operated in partnership with local boards of education, the Ministry of Education and Training, the federations, and the university. The secondary on-site program is based on four guiding principles: knowledge of theory and research; skill in the technical components of teaching; inquiry related to the classroom, school, and societal contexts; and reflection on how theory and research are linked with practice in which knowledge-in-action is developed. These principles provide a foundation for the organization and implementation of the program.

The students spend four days in the schools and one day at the university per week. In the schools they are assigned to one or two associate teachers per semester on the basis of subject specialty. The students gradually assume most of the classroom responsibilities. Their associate teachers teach them the methodology courses in their subject discipline (e.g., how to teach math at the intermediate level), and they evaluate the practice teaching sessions. Students are placed in the schools from opening day in September until the end of April. During the year each student teacher is assigned to at least two associate teachers in two different subject areas. Theory is taught by a faculty member one day a week at the university. Topics in the foundations and methods courses

in the traditional program have been integrated into one course for the purpose of this program. Students are expected to do the assigned readings and to integrate observations of practice with the theory and research.

The purpose of this study was to examine the differences in perceptions between associate teachers and student teachers participating in the secondary school-based teacher education program (on-site program). The research questions are as follows:

1. Are there differences in the perceptions between associate teachers and student teachers regarding the positive and negative elements of the school-based program?
2. What is the nature of the differences in perceptions between the two groups of participants at the secondary level?
3. How do these perceptions relate to previous studies at the elementary level?

## SUBJECTS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

### *Associate teachers*

The sample consisted of 21 associate teachers (seven female and 14 male) whose teaching experience ranged from one year to 32 years. The average number of years of experience was 22 years. The highest degree obtained by 14 associate teachers was at the Bachelor's level. One teacher held a Master's in his discipline, and six had an M.Ed. Seven of the associate teachers reported that they had specialists qualifications in their subject area, and two held principal's qualifications. Some (15 of 21) of the associate teachers indicated that they had previously worked with student teachers. Almost half of the associate teachers (10 of 21) reported that they are over 50 years of age. Eight are between 41 and 50, and three reported that they are between 26 and 40.

In April all 33 associate teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire, which consisted of five parts. The first section included seven questions to provide demographic information (sex, number of years teaching, highest degree, other professional qualifications, age range, reasons for becoming involved in the on-site program, and if they had previously worked with student teachers). Part two required associate teachers to comment on the benefits of the program under five headings: pupils, student teachers, the school, associate teachers, and other. In part three respondents were asked to state the negative elements of

the program under the same headings as for part two. In the fourth section associate teachers were asked to list ways the on-site program could be improved. All items in parts two, three, and four were open-ended. The fifth component was composed of eleven items. For seven of these questions associate teachers were required to evaluate the program and the learning of the student teachers. The items included an overall rating of the program; comparisons of these student teachers with previous cohorts of University of Ottawa student teachers (practical skills, knowledge of educational theory, knowledge of adolescents, knowledge of school board practices), usefulness of the student handouts that were distributed, and usefulness of the weekly visits by the faculty member. Respondents answered the above items using a five-point Likert scale. Associate teachers were also asked if they would be willing to become involved in the program next year and if they would recommend the program to colleagues. Responses for these two items were in a Yes or No format. There was also an item in which teachers were asked to rate their own learning from involvement in the program (using a five-point Likert scale). For the final item, respondents were invited to comment further on the on-site program. Questionnaires were read and edited by two associate teachers to ensure appropriateness of language and content validity.

The faculty member distributed the questionnaires to the associate teachers during the first week of April. An instruction sheet was included, and the faculty member explained the instructions orally to many of the associate teachers. Associate teachers were to complete the items and return the form to the faculty member using the attached self-addressed envelope.

### *Student teachers*

Eleven of the 12 student teachers in the program completed the questionnaire. Of the student cohort there were nine females and two males. The highest degree earned by ten of the students was at the Bachelor's level and one held a Master's degree in his subject area. Ten of the students indicated that they had previously worked in a school, and five reported that they had previously worked in a mentor-style relationship. The students ranged in age between 23 years and 46 years. The average age for this group was 30 years.

The questionnaire for the student teachers consisted of five sections. The first part contained four items designed to produce demographic data. Questions in parts two, three, and four were exactly the same as

for the associate teachers, producing data on benefits, negative elements, and suggestions for improvement. The fifth section consisted of three quantitative items in which students were required to evaluate the program, their preparedness to teach, and the usefulness of the on-campus classes. The response scale for the first and third, respectively, of these items was a five-point Likert scale. A Yes or No response scale was used for the second of these items. Four of the items in this section required the respondents to rate themselves on their practical teaching and classroom skills; knowledge of educational theory; knowledge of adolescents; and knowledge of school and board practices, the community, and educational issues. A five-point Likert scale was used for these items. One item required student teachers to state which elements of the on-campus classes were useful. For another item students reported areas in which they felt their preservice teacher education left them poorly prepared. The final item required the students to indicate whether they would recommend that other student teachers become involved in the on-site program (Yes or No).

The questionnaires were distributed at the end of the last class during the fourth week in April. Instructions were given by the faculty member, and students completed the questionnaires before they left the class.

### *Data analysis*

The data produced from both questionnaires were analyzed in similar ways. The quantitative data were analyzed descriptively to produce means, standard deviations, and, for some items, frequency counts. Data from the qualitative questions were analyzed by identifying themes for each item and noting the frequency for each theme. A single researcher analyzed both sets of data. Reliability was established as responses from the quantitative data were supported by data produced by the qualitative data. For this study only items which produced data with important differences between associate teachers and student teachers was used.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### *Benefits for pupils*

Almost half of the associate teachers (9 of 21) reported that pupils had the opportunity to experience a variety of teaching styles. One teacher wrote, "provides some variety of approaches and ideas, as well as tech-

niques". Another commented, "a new face; a variety of approaches and strategies". It is possible that the associate teachers viewed variety as a benefit because they may have been concerned about the lack of variety in their own teaching practice. Therefore, it was the student teachers who infused the program with variety by adopting different approaches in their lessons. Interestingly, only three of the student teachers reported variety of teaching styles as a benefit for pupils. The students viewed the variety in terms of relieving the monotony of a single teacher and enrichment through exposure to different perspectives. They wrote, "the kids get a break from the regular teacher; some students respond better to the student teacher; pupils get to have two teachers instead of one" and "they get to work with two teachers and gain two points of view". That eight student teachers did not report variety as a benefit for pupils is interesting because it is possible that they did not believe that having a different style than their associate teacher was positive. Some of them may not have chosen to deviate too sharply from the teachers' style or to adopt approaches that were radically different for fear of a poor report. This notion of passive acceptance of the status quo is also found in the literature on practice teaching within a traditional teacher education program (MacKinnon, 1989). MacDonald et al. (1992) viewed this passive acceptance as an institutional constraint in their study of the elementary school-based program. Other students may not have deviated from the approach used by the associate teachers so as not to disrupt the pupils and cause themselves problems in class discipline. Kagan (1992) writes that student teachers are obsessed with class control and will design lessons and modify their teaching behaviour to maintain control.

### *Benefits to student teachers*

The most important benefit of the on-site program for student teachers as reported by the associate teachers is the realistic experience (17 of 21). Their comments focused on the real-life experience of working in a school for a long period of time: "involvement in the everyday realities of longer-term teaching (e.g., fatigue and burnout, relationships with students, annoying administrative work)" and "seeing the long term planning of a course". It is possible that these associate teachers were comparing the experience received by these student teachers to their own training program. For some of those teachers hired in the 1960s, training consisted of a six-week course in the summer, with no contact with adolescents and little opportunity to develop practical teaching skills prior to the opening day of school.

What they perceived they needed was more field experience, and this may have been projected to their student teachers.

Interestingly, only two student teachers commented on the realistic experience. The benefit they reported most frequently was the time to develop teaching abilities and confidence (8 of 11). One student wrote: "excellent practical experience; [I] honed skills of classroom discipline, organization, test writing and questioning". Another student teacher stated, "time to establish routines and coping techniques". Student teachers may be less concerned with a realistic experience than their associates because field experience is now an important part in every teacher education program. Sufficient time to develop skills was important to these student teachers, which may reflect their need to master the practical elements of teaching and to gain confidence with adolescent pupils. The importance of developing procedures, classroom skills, and knowledge of pupils is also reported in the literature (Deal & Chatman, 1989; Huling & Hall, 1982; Kagan, 1992; Snow, 1988).

### *Benefits to associate teachers*

Over half of the associate teachers (12 of 21) reported that a benefit for them was the opportunity to reflect on their own teaching. Teachers wrote the following: "great reflection on why one does an activity with the students," "helps me reflect on my own teaching," and "provides an opportunity for personal reassessment of teaching strategies". With these secondary teachers it is possible that with their hectic professional life, they have little time to reflect. It is also possible that working with student teachers provides an occasion to reflect. Students in the programs were encouraged to question the associate teachers about their use of approaches and techniques. Moreover, students in the secondary program often employed different styles and approaches than their associate teachers. Therefore, when questioned or presented directly with a new technique, some secondary teachers had the occasion to think critically about their own practice.

Although associate teachers indicated that they had reflected on their own practice as a result of involvement in the program, it does not seem to have been conveyed to the student teachers. Only one of the student teachers commented on the positive effect of reflection on the part of associate teachers. Seven of the student teachers indicated that professional development was a benefit for the associate teachers. One student teacher wrote: "a refresher for them; they learn from us as well". Another student made the following comment: "[We] really showed



the teachers that we had some new and creative approaches to teaching; one teacher who did not use group work at all started to change his way of thinking.”

A second benefit for associate teachers as viewed by the student teachers was time to attend to other duties. Students commented that their work in the classroom gave the teachers relief from the “routine”, “administrative duties,” and “teaching”. Interestingly, only two associate teachers commented on having time to accomplish other tasks. It is possible that most of these teachers did not perceive that they had extra time as a result of working with the student teachers.

### *Benefits for the school*

Associate teachers reported that the most important benefit for the school of the on-site program was the enthusiasm of the student teachers (8 of 21). One teacher stated: “the student teachers played a significant role in so far as youthful enthusiasm was most welcome in sports, in curriculum and on special committees”. Other associate teachers also wrote the following comments, “the fresh insight and extra enthusiasm”, “brought some youth into the school,” and “opportunity to gain from energy and enthusiasm of student teacher”. From these comments it is clear that the work done in the classrooms and in the school by the student teachers was appreciated by the teachers. As many of them had more than 20 years experience they may have expressed a need for their own re-energizing. These student teachers may have assisted them in satisfying this need.

Only two student teachers commented on the benefit to the school of enthusiasm. For a few of the student teachers (3 of 11) the chief benefit of the program for the school was unpaid help. These students made the following comments: “free help”, “extra teachers, workers at no extra cost, more resource people” and “ [the school] gained unpaid staff who contributed a great deal to the life of the school”. Some students clearly felt exploited. They wrote: “I felt taken advantage of”, “being at the mercy of your supervisor,” and “you become a slave”. Interestingly, some associate teachers did not seem to be aware of the subtleties of the power relation between themselves and their students. One associate teacher referred rather insensitively to student teachers as “gofers”.

### *Negative elements for pupils*

Student teachers reported that the most important problem for pupils was the confusion over the classroom authority figures (5 of 10). One

student teacher wrote: "There is some confusion over who is actually in charge – who the students are responsible to: difference in expectations, working styles between student teacher and regulars can cause confusion."

The above comment may explain why student teachers did not view variety of teaching styles as a benefit for pupils. Another student wrote, "[pupils] had to adjust to a number of teachers and teaching styles, this may be considered good or bad". Student teachers may have regarded variety as contributing to difficulties in their class management and discipline. Establishing one's self as an authority figure in the classroom is clearly a need for student teachers. Other student teachers wrote: "there may be some confusion regarding who their teacher is and who has the power" and "confusion as to authority figures in class". Interestingly, no associate teachers commented on this confusion. It is possible that they were not aware of any incidents where the authority of the student teacher may have been weak or undermined. It is also possible that they did not recognize that some student teachers perceived their own sense of classroom control as tenuous.

#### **SUMMARY**

The findings of the present study on the secondary school-based program show that there were similarities and differences in the perceptions of associate teachers and student teachers. Both groups reported that student teachers benefited from the length of time spent in the schools. The associate teachers perceived that this school-based program provided student teachers with an experience that closely resembled the workload of a teacher. However, the students perceived that the length of time provided them not so much with a realistic experience but rather the time to develop the classroom skills necessary to survive during their first years of teaching.

Associate teachers and student teachers differed in their perceptions in the area of classroom control. The associate teachers viewed the variety in teaching approaches and styles provided by the student teachers as motivational for the pupils. However, some student teachers did not always perceive that variety produced positive effects on students. In some cases they felt that deviating from the approaches used by the associate teacher produced pupil misbehaviour and challenges to their sense of authority. This finding is different from that reported by student teachers in the elementary on-site program who stated that they imitated the style of the associate teacher in order to receive a

good report (MacDonald et al., 1992). These differences between the perceptions of elementary and secondary student teachers may be related to the context of their classroom experience and the age of the pupils they were teaching.

Another difference in perceptions between the associate teachers and the student teachers was in the area of benefits to associate teachers. The associate teachers reported that as a result of involvement in the on-site program they had the opportunity to reflect on their own practice. Whereas the student teachers viewed the benefits for associate teachers as having release time and the opportunity to learn new techniques. The final difference in perceptions was related to the enthusiasm of the student teachers. In this respect the associate teachers commented on the energy and enthusiasm the student teachers exuded in the classroom and the time they gave to extracurricular activities. In reality the student teachers may have felt that they could not deny the requests of the associate teachers to do extra teaching, marking, or supervision. The energy and enthusiasm may have been a facade hiding their feelings of resentment for being treated as unpaid help. Unfortunately, the student teachers did not voice their concerns to their associate teachers for fear of receiving an unfavourable report. In previous studies on the elementary on-site program, student teachers expressed concerns about their relationship with their associate teachers relative to teaching styles but not pertaining to workload (Duquette, 1993; MacDonald et al., 1992).

The results of this study demonstrate that student teachers view opportunities for extended periods of classroom experience as important components of a preservice program. It is in the classroom that student teachers learn the practical skills and understand how theory and practice are linked. Essentially, student teachers report that it is during practice teaching that they learn to teach (Henry, 1989; Richardson-Koehler, 1988). Unfortunately, most programs do not include extended periods of classroom experience, and many first-year teachers begin without a clear understanding of the complexity of their work and the amount of time required to do it (Childers & Podemski, 1982-1983; Deal & Chatman, 1989; Huling & Hall, 1982; Kagan, 1992; Olson, 1991; Weinstein, 1988).

The results also show that associate teachers involved in extended practice teaching situations should be aware of the power relationship that develops between themselves and their student teachers. Student

teachers perceive that the associate teachers have the power to deny them entry into their chosen profession. Therefore, associate teachers should recognize that student teachers may overextend themselves in an attempt to appear enthusiastic and capable. One of the roles of associate teachers in a school-based program is clearly to monitor the stress felt by the student teachers due to the demands of classroom duties and extracurricular duties.

Another finding of this study is that associate teachers feel that they benefit from their involvement in the school-based teacher education program. It provides the opportunity for individual classroom teachers to examine critically their own teaching and to learn new techniques from their student teachers. It may also re-energize experienced teachers and renew their enthusiasm for working with pupils. Therefore, working with student teachers for an extended period of time is a relevant and important professional development activity for classroom teachers. It may have more direct impact on pupils than many other professional development activities.

School reform at the grassroots level must begin with individual teachers reflecting on their teaching and acting to improve it. Restructured preservice programs in the form of school-based programs provide the occasion for this process to occur. In this regard school-based teacher education programs may be the vehicle for changing how teachers attain their preservice education and their on-going professional development.

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