

Student Teaching Experience: Teacher Candidates' Perceptions toward Cooperating Teachers and University Supervisors' Mentoring Efforts

Heng-Yu Ku, Chelsie Hess, Elizabeth Leeper,
Kimberly Kaufeld, Scott Kreider, Nancy Sileo, and Eugene Sheehan

University of Northern Colorado



Abstract

This study focused on both quantitative and qualitative data gathered from 120 teacher candidates. A survey that assesses on teacher candidates' perceptions toward their cooperating teachers and university supervisors' mentoring efforts during their student teaching experience was analyzed. The results revealed that teacher candidates rated highly on their cooperating teachers and university supervisors' mentoring efforts and there was no significant difference between their mentoring efforts. Furthermore, some emerging themes from the open-ended questions were identified.

Background

- Student teaching is a key element in preparing pre-service teachers.
- The experience provides future teachers the chance to reflect upon his/ her own practice as well as gain insight from cooperating teachers and university supervisors.
- Theoretical framework = student teaching triad model.
- The triad model is a common method used during student teaching, which involves teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors. According to Rodgers and Keil (2007), the structure of the student teaching supervision triad has remained largely unchanged over the last 15 years.
- **Purpose:** Investigate the student teaching triad model in the teacher education program at our institution. Specifically, teacher candidates' perceptions toward their cooperating teachers and university supervisors' mentoring efforts during their student teaching experience were examined. Emerging themes from the open-ended questions were identified.

Research Question

- The following research questions were addressed:
1. Were there differences in the ratings of cooperating teachers and university supervisors' mentoring efforts from teacher candidates?
 2. What were teacher candidates' perceptions toward their cooperating teachers' mentoring efforts during their student teaching experience?
 3. What were teacher candidates' perceptions toward their university supervisors' mentoring efforts during their student teaching experience?

Method

Participants. 120 teacher candidates in the professional teacher education program.

Roles.

- Teacher candidates (TC): Teacher in Training
 - Handbook at the beginning of the semester of student teaching and responsible for providing a copy to the CT on the first day of student teaching.
- Cooperating teachers (CT)
 - Collaborate with the TC throughout the semester.
 - Evaluate the TC's performance on various state content standards twice during the semester.
- University supervisors' (US)
 - Scheduling a meeting at the beginning of the semester with the CT.
 - One contact per week via email or in person with TC.
 - Evaluate the TC's performance on various state content standards three times during the semester.

Instrument and Procedures. Teacher candidates completed the *Teacher Candidate Exit Survey* via *Qualtrics* at the end of the student teaching experience.

- 7-item questionnaire and open-ended questions: Assessed the CT and USs' mentoring efforts based on TCs' perceptions.
- 5-point Likert-scale with items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
- Opened-ended question asked the TC to comment on the performance of his/her CT and US.

Data Analysis.

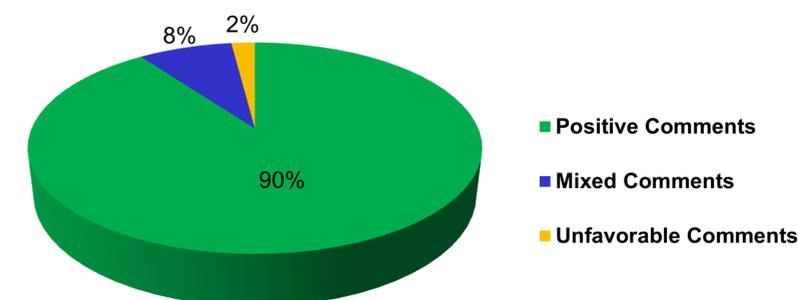
- Likert-scale responses calculated for each of the survey items.
- Question 1: Independent sample t-test assessed differences in the mean scores between the cooperating teachers and university supervisors.
- Questions 2 and 3: Thematic analysis identified emerging themes from the open-ended questions.

Results

Q1: Teacher Candidates' Ratings of Cooperating Teachers and University Supervisors

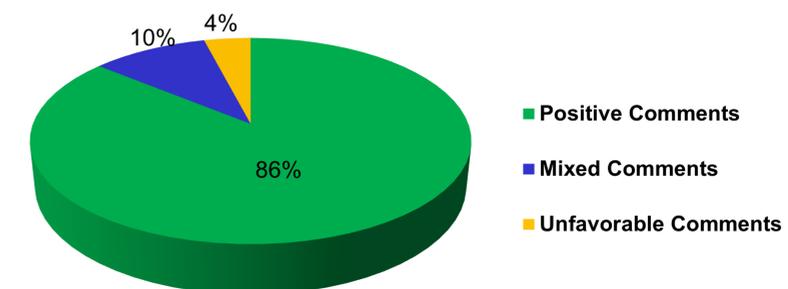
- Overall, TCs rated highly on their CTs and USs' mentoring efforts during their student teaching experience. The TCs rated the USs' mentoring efforts ($M = 4.47$) higher than their CTs' ($M = 4.41$).
- There was no significant difference between these two ratings at the 0.05 level, $t(119) = -0.83$, $p = 0.41$.

Q2: Teacher Candidates' Perceptions toward Cooperating Teachers



Five themes emerged as the most positive comments of the mentoring effort of their cooperating teachers during their student teaching experience. These themes were 1). Constructive Feedback, 2). Encouragement, 3). Effective Coaching, 4). High expectations, and 5). Support.

Q3: Teacher Candidates' Perceptions toward University Supervisors



Five themes emerged as the most positive comments of the mentoring effort of their university supervisors during their student teaching experience. These themes were 1). Helpfulness, 2). Flexibility, 3). Knowledgeable, 4). Positive Feedback, and 5). Supportive.

Implications

- Changes in the student teaching practices. For example, the possibility of building a stronger partnership by inviting CTs and USs to a workshop at the beginning of the student teaching semester.
- Assist other teacher preparation programs with strategies for program evaluation that contributes to data-informed decision making and continuous program improvement.