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Expectations for the Role of the Cooperating Teacher

By Dr. Douglas Busman and Dr. Linda McCrea, GVSU Faculty

Grand Valley State University's College of Education takes prides in its' "Exemplary Status" teacher preparation program as recognized for the third year by the State of Michigan. Part of excelling continually is keeping in touch with the participants in the program to ever improve quality.

A multi-phase study is currently underway in the College of Education led by the Director of Teacher Preparation, Associate Professor Linda McCrea and Associate Professor Douglas Busman. The current phase of this research is examining the student teaching experience itself and in particular the expectations that the student teacher, cooperating teacher, and the university field coordinator each hold for the role of the cooperating teacher.

During the 2009-2010 school years, nine focus groups were conducted consisting of Grand Valley elementary student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university field coordinators. The sessions were transcribed and coded using six categories which reflect the expectations and attitudes the participants in the student teaching experience have for the role of the cooperating teacher during the student teaching practicum. The categories examined included expectations related to academic content; technical aspects of teaching including classroom management; the art of teaching; personal orientations and interpersonal aspects of the mentoring experience; the cooperating teachers as agent of societal change and attitudes regarding the teaching profession (Rajuan, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2007).



The results of this study provide many insights related to the six orientations and attitudes examined. One of the most significant insights suggests that cooperating teachers expect their role in the student teaching experience to be primarily focused on the technical and practical aspects of teaching in the elementary classroom. In addition, they view their role in developing a personal orientation toward the student teacher in the mentoring experience

as a less important expectation.

Student teachers and university field coordinators concur with the cooperating teacher regarding high expectations for the technical and practical aspects of the role but place their highest emphasis on the personal orientation and mentoring expectations. This mismatch of expectations is of interest since alignment of expectations provides the basis for productive collaboration.

By surfacing the expectations that each participant brings for the role of the cooperating teacher, Grand Valley's teacher preparation program is working to align these expectations and thus continue to ensure the most beneficial student teaching experience possible.

Reference

Rajuan M., Beijaard D. & Verloop, N. (2007). The Role of the Cooperating Teacher: Bridging the Gap between the Expectations of Cooperating Teachers and Student Teachers. *Mentoring and Tutoring: Partnerships in Learning* 15 (3), 223-242

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