

Teacher Development Program: A Vehicle For Assisting Pre-Service Teachers

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ABSTRACT

In 1990 the Teacher Development Program was created by the Office of Professional Field Experiences at Southeastern Louisiana University to better the quality and improve the success rate of teacher candidates and student teachers. The fundamental principle behind the program was to provide assistance for pre-service teachers who need immediate intervention to prevent poor performance or possible failure. This article describes the goals of the program and the services offered almost 20 years after its inception.

Keywords: teacher development, pre-service teachers, teacher performance, teacher programs, teacher assistance, preparing teachers

INTRODUCTION

With increased societal demands for teacher accountability, we are constantly and critically aware of the need to prepare teachers who are extremely knowledgeable regarding content, pedagogical strategies, professional standards, social awareness and who are also psychologically healthy (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Knowles & Sudzina, 1991; Kyriacou, 1987; Kyriacou & Stephens, 1999). Teaching is a highly demanding and extraordinarily complex profession requiring teachers to make wise decisions constantly.

At Southeastern Louisiana University, a person desiring to become a teacher must maintain academic standards and demonstrate requisite qualifications for successful teaching, including interpersonal skills, basic communication skills, appropriate professional conduct, and a satisfactory performance in field experiences. University faculty members, advisors, supervisors, and administrators of pre-service teachers are encouraged to establish and maintain high standards of ethical concern for the teacher candidates they are preparing, as well as for the students those teachers may ultimately serve (Raths & Lyman 2003).

Organized teacher candidate assistance programs are limited or often unorganized, leaving identified concerns unaddressed or uncorrected, sometimes allowing teachers with deficiencies entering the teaching profession unprepared emotionally and/or pedagogically (Lamont, 1993). Throughout our teacher training program, university faculty and school personnel are encouraged to raise “red flags” regarding academic, social, psychological, and pedagogical concerns related to effective teaching and instruction. To address the growing concerns of teacher education faculty and school personnel, the College of Education and Human Development at Southeastern Louisiana University, through its Student Admission and Retention in Teacher Education Committee (SARTE), approved a systematic referral process for its faculty and supportive school staff who identify specific problems in the performance of teacher candidates. The Teacher Development Program is designed to better the quality and improve the success rate of Southeastern teacher candidates.

Program Goals

Over the years, the Teacher Development Program has maintained three main goals. First, it proactively strives to promote the professional development of Southeastern teacher candidates and instill in them the appreciation for continued professional development activities that can increase their knowledge of the learner, their knowledge of pedagogical strategies, and their abilities to recognize requirements of policies at Southeastern, the state, and the nation. In addition to required class work, teacher candidates attend professional development

workshops to prepare them to contribute positively to the educational development of children and youth in area schools.

Knowles and Sudzina (1991) found that student teachers' expectations and prior experience often don't match realities, creating problems. To address those discrepancies, specialized seminars and workshops for all students, faculty, or a select group are conducted on topics such as time management, lesson planning, inclusion, classroom management, technology in the classroom, differentiated instruction, test-taking skills, individual learner needs, job interview preparation and stress management. Approximately sixteen workshops are conducted each semester; with an additional five opportunities to view educational videos. Hosting workshops such as these are grounded in previous research (Atici, 2007; Poulou, 2007; Sudzina & Knowles, 1992) showing that teacher efficacy is an important part of teacher-candidate success and that courses and workshops can increase that efficacy. The goals of the Teacher Development Center encourage teacher candidates to continue to develop professionally through continuing education, assuming greater responsibilities in making personal decisions, and in designing their own professional development programs in order to develop educational change in their future schools.

Second, continuing to address the professional needs of our teacher candidates, the Program aims to provide a physical location (Teacher Development Center) housing a library of educational resources and professional reference materials to assist teacher candidates in mastering content, creating enthusiasm for content, and developing materials for their classrooms. The faculty and staff assisting with activities in the Teacher Development Center are eager to facilitate the success of Southeastern teacher candidates as they proceed through the necessary coursework to prepare them for life-long learning. These professionals with extensive teaching experience are dedicated to helping students acquire the skills, strategies, and techniques that will result in successful work with diverse learners. Students spend time in the Center creating student-centered activities that can be used in the classroom, preparing for an inviting classroom climate, and researching to make their teaching appropriate to instill a love of learning in today's students. Students have access to die-cuts, laminating machine, video library, various educational manipulatives, and library resources. There is no charge for using any of the materials, and students pay a minimal fee for consumables such as transparencies, sentence strips, etc. Teacher candidates frequent the Center as teachers assign various projects; once they are aware of the opportunities there, they continue to return.

Finally, and possibly most importantly, the Program provides assistance to teacher candidates who need immediate intervention to prevent poor performance or possible failure during their teacher preparation. In this area specific objectives include:

1. To provide pedagogical support to help the students improve their teaching performance in the areas of lesson planning, classroom procedures, classroom interaction, and classroom management.
2. To provide personal support services to aid students in managing their personal lives through referrals to the University Counseling Center. (Knowles and Sudzina (1991) suggested that personal external factors, a detriment to student teaching be addressed as soon as possible.)
3. To develop a resource file of University and community services appropriate for student referrals and assistance.

PLAN FOR PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO TEACHER CANDIDATES

Activities

Once a student has been identified to the Coordinator of the Teacher Development Program by self-referral or faculty referral, the Coordinator will contact the student via e-mail or telephone and plan a meeting. At the initial meeting, the student and the Coordinator will work together to determine issues and concerns, possible activities, and appropriate interventions. The Coordinator and the referred student will then develop a Professional Improvement Plan (PIP) indicating the identified obstacle/difficulties and a course of remediation protocol or support. The Coordinator then monitors the student until the completion of his/her teacher education program or until other career choices have been selected with the referral teacher periodically updated on the student's progress. When necessary, the Coordinator, together with the student, may modify the PIP.

If a student chooses not to participate in the program, that desire is documented, and the referring teacher notified.

Pedagogical Support Services

The support services provided through the Teacher Development Program to address the pedagogical and personal needs of students include, but are not limited to, the following activities:

1. Personal meetings will provide the teacher candidate the opportunity to discuss performance evaluations and remediation strategies as well as review placement difficulties and/or personality conflicts. In some instances, the Coordinator might refer the student to the University Counseling Center for professional counseling activities.
2. Directive field observations of a master teacher in a local public school district will serve as models to refine the teaching skills of the teacher candidate.
3. A resource library will afford the referred student self-help opportunities by providing videos of teaching models and teaching strategies. Printed materials, audio tapes and video tapes specializing in self-improvement, educational practices, and teaching strategies will be available to the student.
4. Intensive supervision will allow the Coordinator of the Teacher Development Program to observe the student. This often reveals a continued problem with time management, incomplete work, inattention to deadlines, etc. Often, students will be required to teach a unit in another school to provide additional immediate feedback. Master teachers in the College will be asked to assist in the observation process.
5. Whenever possible, the teacher candidate will be required to video a lesson to encourage self-reflection and self-evaluation and to assist the Coordinator with conferencing.

Personal Support Services

1. Personal guidance will be offered by the Coordinator of the Teacher Development Program to students who need to make program adjustments because of temporary problems involving medical, physical, financial, family, legal and/or other hardships. Referrals are made to appropriate auxiliary service when necessary.
2. Student teaching support groups will be developed to assist participants during a stressful student teaching experience.
3. Specialized testing will be offered as a service of the Teacher Development Program. Examples include pre-post grammar, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Multiple Intelligences.
4. Computer software will be available to all students for such activities as preparation for the Praxis.

CONCLUSION

In 1990 the Teacher Development Program was created to improve the quality and the success rate of teacher candidates and student teachers. The fundamental principle behind the program was to provide assistance for pre-service teachers who need immediate intervention to prevent poor performance or possible failure. Although originally funded through an external grant, the sustainability of the project is obvious as the program continues to function almost twenty years later.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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