

A COMPARISON OF THE IMPACT OF TEACHING EVENTS UPON THE EXPERIENCE OF ENTRY-LEVEL AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This study compared the nature and impact of teaching events experienced by 64 beginning agricultural education teachers from three cohorts. Initial events or experiences that had a major or critical impact upon the teaching experiences were: feeling in control of their programs, receiving respect from students, feeling support from their principal, experiencing self-confidence in their teaching and successful teaching activities, and observing students succeed in their classes. Events within the peers, students, curriculum, and system categories of the Teacher Proximity Continuum (Camp & Heath-Camp, 1992) ranked highest in impact. The author concluded the frequency and impact of the teaching events differed by cohort. As a result, recommendations were made to administer questionnaires and conduct interviews to identify the events perceived to influence the teaching of the entry-level teachers.

BACKGROUND

The convergence of pressures from global competition, an aging American work force, sliding student achievement scores, high teacher attrition rates, and an imminent mass retirement of our most experienced public school teachers has caused policy makers, state department of education leaders, school administrators, researchers, and teacher educators to examine and revise the practices of preparing and retaining teachers (Carnegie Task Force on the Future of Teaching, 1986; Holmes Group, 1986; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996; Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2002; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). Despite the limited supply of some types of teachers (e.g., technology education, agricultural education, specials needs, mathematics, science), Americans still want teachers in the classrooms who can teach. This sentiment reflects research findings that show that student achievement and performance levels are higher when

taught by well-prepared and experienced classroom teachers (Hawk, Coble, & Swanson, 1985; Monk, 1994; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2002; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000; Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2001; Darling-Hammond, Chung & Frelow, 2002). Unfortunately, many students, especially students from rural and urban settings, do not benefit from the expertise of quality teachers (Ingersoll, 1999, 2001). Instead, they see a steady stream of teachers coming and going due to a variety of events that affected their initial teaching experience and decision to leave the profession.

Twenty to 30% of new teachers leave teaching within the first three years (DePaul, 2000) and 50% to 60% leave the profession within the first five to six years (Jensen, 1986; Curtis, 1985; Marso & Pigge, 1997). As a result of the annual exodus of beginning teachers, efforts continue to be made by colleges, state departments of education, and policy makers (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003) to limit teacher attrition and maintain quality educators by establishing revised standards for preservice preparation. In addition, as more is becoming known about the experiences of beginning teachers, more states and school districts are attending to the needs for assistance, support, and evaluation by providing desired forms of assistance and attending to events that impact their initial teaching experience (Brewster & Railsback, 2001; National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, 2002). Additional knowledge concerning the nature of and the impact of teaching events upon the experience of beginning teachers is critical given the need to retain effective teachers. The importance of having current information regarding their initial teaching experiences cannot be underestimated. Gold (1996) asserted that the initial teaching experiences and events of beginning teachers result in deeply imprinted perceptions and behaviors about students, school environment, and their role as a teacher. These experiences are often drawn upon as reference points for subsequent teacher thoughts and actions throughout the initial stages of their career.

RELATED LITERATURE

A number of theories and evidence exist concerning the processes of teacher development, instructional difficulties of novice teachers, and the teaching events that influence the experience of beginning teachers. Fessler and Christensen (1992) proposed that the experience of developing teachers is influenced by common elements of a personal environment, an organizational environment, and a professional career cycle. Many theorists believe that the initial teaching events result in a significant amount of emotional turmoil for most beginning teachers. Fessler and Christensen (1992), Fuller (1969), Ryan (1986), and Moir (1990) suggest beginning teachers often go through a period of unrealistic views of teaching, or a fantasy period, before fully experiencing the reality shock of teaching and initial survival experiences. Moir (1990) indicates the attitudes of beginning teachers continue to deteriorate to disenchantment until the middle of the year at which time they put bad events behind and begin to change their focus more upon impacting the learning experiences of the students. Huberman (1993) proposed that the first three years are a time of beginnings and teachers feeling their way as new professionals. Teachers are engaged in survival and discovery experiences that culminate near the time of acquiring tenure. This period is followed by about three years of stabilization, a period of more focus on instructional matters and less focus upon self. Waters (1988) suggested novice teachers initially resolve events and concerns related to self. Once personal needs are addressed, the beginning teacher focuses on completing teaching tasks. After they are comfortable with their abilities to conduct teaching tasks they shift their

efforts to creating an learning environment and activities that have a greater impact upon the students. In summary, beginning teachers are affected by events as they progress through developmental changes. Their focus and attitudes generally move from attention to self, then to teaching tasks, and finally to the task of influencing the needs of the students.

During the time period when investigators were developing theories concerning the life cycle of teachers, other researchers investigated specific events that influenced the experiences of beginning teachers. Researchers found that entry-level teachers often experienced difficulty with various aspects of classroom management or discipline (Talbert, Camp, & Heath-Camp, 1994; Mundt, 1991; Nichols & Mundt, 1996; Mundt & Connors, 1999, Joerger & Boettcher, 2000). Motivating students to learn was also found to be a challenge (Veenman, 1984; Garton & Chung, 1996, 1997; Mundt & Connors, 1999). Mundt (1991) and Edwards and Briers (2000) found they had difficulty in changing and designing curricula to meet local needs. Program design, planning, administration, and evaluation were additional challenges many new teachers experience (Birkenholz & Harbtreit, 1987; Garton & Chung, 1996, 1997; Mundt, 1991; Mundt & Connors, 1999). Other researchers found beginning teachers have difficulty understanding complex school or community systems and policies (Veenman, 1984; Griffen, 1985; Odell, 1986; Mundt & Connors, 1999). Veenman (1984) found that insufficient time for preparation due to heavy teaching loads and relationships with colleagues were also high ranking difficulties of beginning teachers. Findings from other studies indicated that beginning agricultural education teachers have difficulty with advising and/or managing the FFA program (Birkenholz & Harbtreit, 1987; Talbert, Camp & Heath-Camp, 1994; Mundt & Connors, 1999; Edwards & Briers, 2000).

Concurrent with investigations of the needs of beginning teachers by other researchers and members of their staff, Camp and Heath-Camp (1992) and Heath-Camp, Camp, Adams-Casmus, Talbert, and Barber (1992) used the Teacher Proximity Continuum (TPC) to illustrate, categorize, and prioritize the problems, concerns and challenges of beginning career and technical education teachers (See Figure 1). The *internal* category of the teacher continuum encompasses the needs and challenges arising from factors within the teacher. *Pedagogy* includes experiences related to short term planning, delivery, evaluation, and improvement of instruction. The *curriculum* category includes experiences related to the intermediate planning of course content and preparation for instruction. *Program* experiences are events that arise in conjunction with the long term planning and operation of the department or program. The *students* category consists of experiences that result from exchanges with students. Experiences arising from contacts and exchanges with co-workers are categorized in the *peers* category. The *system* category encompasses experiences arising from individuals and forces from within the educational system that require compliance. Experiences arising from outside the administrative and physical bounds of the educational system are part of the *community* category.

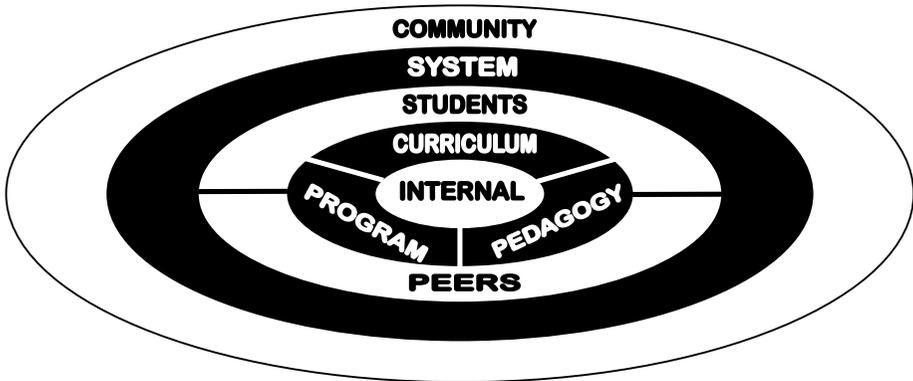


Figure 1

Teacher Proximity Continuum (Adapted from Heath-Camp, Camp, Adams-Casmus, Talbert, & Barber, 1992)

Heath-Camp, Camp, Adams-Casmus, Talbert, and Barber (1992) used the TPC to structure the findings of a study designed to understand the events that influenced the experience of beginning career and technical education teachers. Teaching events are the concerns, problems, occurrences and non-occurrences, and challenges that affect the experience of the teacher. They examined two years of logs of five teachers certified through traditional licensure routes (TEC) and seven through alternative pathways (NTEC). They found the student, system, and program categories were the proximity categories associated with the greatest proportion of significant events. Given the unique context for educating the participants, Heath-Camp et al. (1992) concluded that nearly 25% and 31% of the negative and positive influences could be assigned to the unique features of career and technical education.

Joerger and Boettcher (2000) investigated teaching events that affected beginning teachers. However, they did not place and report the events by categories of the Teacher Proximity Continuum. They found individual events which had the greatest impact on beginning agricultural education teachers included having a sense of control of their program, experiencing respect from the students, feeling self-confident in their teaching, experiencing satisfaction from successful activities, observing student success, knowing the principal supports them, and having an overwhelming work load.

Little is known about how the impact of the events and categories of events as described by Camp & Heath-Camp (1992) differ by cohorts of beginning teachers. Information regarding the occurrence and impact of independent events that affect the teaching experience of beginning agricultural education teachers is needed to inform preservice teacher education instruction and

practices, and to further enhance planning, monitoring, delivery and evaluation of induction programs and activities for beginning agricultural education teachers.

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the study, therefore, was to determine the nature of selected teaching events as experienced by three consecutive cohorts of beginning secondary agricultural education teachers from Minnesota. The objectives of the study were to compare the: (a) frequency of occurrence of selected teaching events, and (b) impact of the selected teaching events upon the teaching experience of three consecutive cohorts of beginning teachers.

METHODOLOGY

This was a descriptive census study of 64 beginning secondary agricultural education teachers who initiated their teaching careers in the 1999-2000, 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 academic years. The respective populations for the cohorts consisted of 29, 23, and 12 teachers. The mean age of the 64 Caucasian agricultural education teachers for the three cohorts was 27 years. The cohorts were made up of 58% (n= 37) females and 42% (n= 27) males. Forty-eight percent (n=31) of the teachers were married. Ninety-four percent (n=60) and six percent (n=4) of the teachers had completed their bachelors and masters degrees, respectively. The average length of contracts for teachers was 9.9 months (SD= 1.2). The beginning teachers were provided an average of 10.2 days to attend workshops and prepare for classes before the beginning of the fall term. Over 70% (n=45) of the teachers received their preservice preparation from two Midwestern land grant universities. Ninety-three percent (n= 60) and 17% (n=11) of the teachers taught agricultural education course work in high schools and/or middle schools, respectively. Teachers taught in schools with varying populations. Twenty-five percent of the teachers taught in schools with 250 or less, 34% in schools with 251-499, 30% in schools with 500-999, six percent in schools with 1,000-1,999 and nine percent in schools with 2000 or more students. Fifty percent (n=32) of the beginning agricultural education teachers reported they were involved in a beginning teacher assistance program sponsored by their local school district.

The research instrument consisted of a reformatted questionnaire developed and tested by Heath-Camp, Camp, Adams-Casmus, Talbert, and Barber (1992). This study focused upon the 39 events and demographics sections of the three-part questionnaire. The 39 items in the events section were derived from lists of events submitted by beginning and practicing career and technical education teachers, and teacher educators. The teachers rated how often the events occurred (5-Always, 4-Often, 3-Occasionally, 2-Rarely, 1-Never) and the corresponding impact of the events on five point Likert-type scale (5-Critical, 4-Major, 3-Moderate, 2-Minor, 1-None).

The face and content validity was established by a panel consisting of two university faculty members, one state supervisor of agricultural education, and two experienced agricultural education teachers. The corresponding estimated internal consistency values as measured by the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for the occurrence and impact scales using post hoc analyses were .62 and .92, respectively. Categories of the Teacher Proximity Continuum (Heath-Camp et al., 1992) were used to divide the 39 items of the instrument into eight subscales. The respective alpha coefficients (and number of items) of the pedagogy, student, system, program, peers, community, curriculum, and internal impact subscales were .70 (8), .80 (7), .67 (8), .64 (4), .60 (2), .30 (2), .25 (1), and .30 (7).

The questionnaire was distributed and administered in-person by the researcher at a seminar for the beginning teachers held during the last week of September or first week of October each year. Participants unable to attend the seminar were contacted and provided a questionnaire. Instruments were returned through the mail within ten days of the seminar. All participants from the cohorts returned usable instruments.

Data were entered and analyzed using the Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS). Descriptive parameters were used to summarize the ratings from the teachers of the individual and combined cohorts. Descriptive parameters were also used to summarize the ratings when the selected events were aggregated into the categories of the Teacher Proximity Continuum (Heath-Camp et al., 1992).

FINDINGS

OBJECTIVE 1: COMPARE THE FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE OF TEACHING EVENTS EXPERIENCED BY BEGINNING AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION TEACHERS.

The data in Table 1 are arranged to illustrate the frequency of occurrence of 39 selected events. Frequency ratings are initially displayed for the combined cohort data from the 1999- 2001 cohorts, like data are then provided for each cohort. The mean frequency data show that 41.5% (n=16), 51.3 (n=20), and 7.7% (n=3), respectively, of the 39 selected events were experienced often or always, occasionally, or rarely by the beginning teachers. Satisfaction was always experienced when activities were viewed as being successful by teachers of the 1999-2001, 1999, and 2001 cohorts. In order, the top five events of the 1999-2001 combined cohorts that occurred often were: (a) my peers act with respect towards me, (b) I have more work to do than I have time to do it, (c) my job allows me to be creative, (d) my principal supports me, and (e) students act with respect towards me. The percentage of the 39 events experienced often or always by beginning teachers for the respective 1999, 2000, and 2001 cohorts of teachers was 48.7% (n=19), 35.9% (n=14), and 46.2% (n=18). Four common events were among the top five events experienced by the beginning teachers of all cohorts. They were: (a) I experience satisfaction when an activity succeeds, (b) my job allows me to be creative, (c) I have more work to do than I have time for completing the work, and (d) my principal supports me. Data provided by the beginning teachers of the 1999, 2000, and 2001 cohorts revealed they occasionally experienced 41% (n=16), 56.4% (n=22), and 46.2% (n=18) of the 39 events, respectively. In addition to rarely experiencing problems due to not understanding school policies or procedures or because the administrator did not provide clear job expectations, beginning teachers from the three cohorts indicated they rarely experienced problems because of poor organization skills.

The researcher and experienced teachers of the project staff used consensus to place the 39 events into the eight categories of the Teacher Proximity Continuum (Camp & Heath-Camp, 1992; Heath-Camp, Camp, Adams-Casmus, Talbert, and Barber (1992). The data in Table 2 reveal that teachers from all cohorts often experienced events within the peers category. Beginning teachers from the 1999 cohort often experienced events within the internal category and teachers from the 2001 cohort often experienced student-related events. The remainder of events

Table 1

Occurrence of Selected Events as Experienced by 1999, 2000, and 2001 Beginning Teachers

Selected Events	1999-01		1999		2000		2001	
	N=64		N=23		N=29		N=12	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
I experience satisfaction when an activity succeeds	4.50 ¹	0.62	4.65	0.56	4.38	0.61	4.50	0.67
My peers act with respect towards me	4.27	0.65	4.22	0.72	3.48	0.93	3.42	0.79
I have more work to do than I have time to do it	4.23	0.94	4.52	0.71	4.00	1.02	4.25	0.97
My job allows me to be creative	4.06	0.83	4.35	0.70	3.93	0.87	3.83	0.83
My principal supports me	4.05	1.06	4.04	1.23	4.07	1.01	4.00	0.74
Students act with respect towards me	3.86	0.50	3.87	0.54	3.76	0.50	4.08	0.29
I feel self-confident in my classroom teaching	3.80	0.65	3.78	0.66	3.79	0.61	3.83	0.72
I see my students succeeding in my class	3.78	0.45	3.78	0.52	3.83	0.38	3.67	0.49
I feel in control of my program	3.70	0.81	3.65	0.63	3.69	0.95	3.83	0.72
I receive positive feedback from my peers	3.67	0.89	3.61	0.92	3.83	0.83	3.42	0.90
My students show pride in their accomplishments	3.59	0.68	3.61	0.64	3.59	0.62	3.58	0.90
I have obtained the goals that I set for myself	3.54	0.59	3.52	0.58	3.54	0.63	3.58	0.51
Local businesses provide support for my program	3.53	0.91	3.70	0.62	3.38	1.06	3.58	0.90
Job tasks that I am doing are already familiar to me	3.53	0.73	3.57	0.71	3.48	0.77	3.58	0.67
My students participate in vocational club activities	3.50	0.82	3.57	0.58	3.62	0.67	3.08	1.31
The subject matter I teach is already familiar to me	3.50	0.80	3.57	0.58	4.24	0.62	4.42	0.51
I have had success using new teaching approaches	3.49	0.64	3.65	0.56	3.36	0.72	3.50	0.52
I have inadequate equipment	3.41	0.94	3.65	0.91	3.31	0.95	3.17	0.83
I see my students working to have better future	3.38	0.65	3.09	0.58	3.48	0.68	3.67	0.49
My students display a lack of self-discipline	3.34	0.76	3.39	0.77	3.41	0.77	3.08	0.67
I am compared to the former teacher	3.31	1.26	3.43	1.31	3.52	1.10	2.58	1.24
I have to do recruitment activities for my program	3.24	1.10	3.22	0.98	3.29	0.96	3.18	1.60

Table 1 (continued)

Selected Events	TPC Category	1999-01 N=64		1999 N=23		2000 N=29		2001 N=12	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
		I have inadequate facilities (classroom, lab, etc)	3.23	1.14	3.39	1.05	3.31	1.21	2.75
I receive positive feedback from my students	3.19	0.78	3.05	0.64	3.17	0.75	3.50	1.00	
I receive expressions of gratitude from my students	3.17	0.70	2.91	0.65	3.24	0.62	3.50	0.80	
Students act unmotivated towards my subject area	3.13	0.65	3.22	0.66	3.07	0.69	3.08	0.51	
I have sufficient funds for supplies and equipment	3.11	1.14	3.13	1.03	2.93	1.26	3.50	0.90	
I have inadequate curriculum materials	3.09	1.00	2.91	1.02	3.24	1.01	3.08	0.90	
My program is misunderstood by parents, students, counselors, and/or administrators	3.08	0.98	3.30	1.00	3.03	0.96	2.75	0.87	
I receive positive feedback from my principal	2.98	1.18	2.96	1.27	3.21	1.03	2.50	1.17	
I am taking classes to further my education	2.97	1.10	3.41	1.07	2.62	1.03	3.00	1.00	
I receive help from my state vocational supervisor	2.92	0.97	2.74	0.90	2.90	1.06	3.36	0.67	
I receive help from my local vocational director	2.90	1.27	2.50	1.08	3.04	1.40	3.36	1.03	
My class sizes are not appropriate for my subject	2.81	1.22	2.52	1.02	3.07	1.34	2.75	1.14	
My home life is negatively affected by work	2.78	1.09	2.87	1.03	2.72	1.14	2.75	1.06	
I have trouble making and sequencing lesson plans	2.58	0.92	2.30	0.75	2.76	1.01	2.67	0.89	
Problems occur due to poor organizational skills	2.33	0.98	2.17	0.82	2.45	0.97	2.33	1.23	
Problems exist due to unclear school policies	2.22	0.81	2.17	0.87	2.28	0.74	2.17	0.83	
Problems occur due to unclear job expectations	2.19	1.13	1.83	0.87	2.38	1.27	2.42	1.00	
Mean Occurrence	3.33		3.33		3.34		3.32		

Note: ¹Frequency Scale: 5=Always, 4=Often, 3=Occasionally, 2=Rarely, 1=Never. ²Teacher Proximity Continuum

Table 2

Frequency of Selected Events Within Categories of the Teacher Proximity Continuum as Experienced by Three Cohorts of Beginning Agricultural Education Teachers

Categories of the TPC		1999-2001 (N = 64)		1999 (N = 23)		2000 (N = 29)		2001 (N = 12)	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Peers	2	3.97 ¹	0.77	3.91	0.82	4.03	0.73	3.92	0.71
Internal	7	3.55	0.90	3.70	0.84	3.49	0.90	3.44	0.90
Student	7	3.38	0.68	3.30	0.64	3.39	0.66	3.50	0.67
Pedagogy	8	3.31	0.75	3.30	0.65	3.35	0.76	3.26	0.83
Program	4	3.24	1.04	3.39	0.98	3.24	1.02	2.96	1.07
Community	2	3.23	0.94	3.22	0.76	3.14	1.06	3.47	0.79
Curriculum	1	3.09	1.00	2.91	1.02	3.24	1.01	3.08	0.90
System	8	3.06	1.09	2.96	1.01	3.12	1.13	3.12	0.97
Mean		3.33		3.33		3.34		3.32	

Note: ¹Frequency Scale: 5=Always, 4=Often, 3=Occasionally, 2=Rarely, 1=Never.

within all categories were only occasionally experienced. While one or two categories of events were experienced often by the beginning teachers, the mean annual data in Table 2 reveal that cohorts only occasionally experienced all categories of events.

OBJECTIVE 2: COMPARE THE IMPACT OF SELECTED TEACHING EVENTS UPON THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BEGINNING TEACHERS.

The data in Table 3 are arranged to show the impact of 39 selected events. The combined data from the three cohorts indicate the beginning teachers rated 79.5% (31) events as having a critical or major impact and 20.5% (eight) as having a moderate impact upon their success. Feeling in control of their program was the one event that had a critical impact upon the experience of the beginning teachers. The highest rated events having a major impact upon their experience included: (a) having principal support, (b) a sense of satisfaction from successful activities, (c) the affects of student respect, (d) seeing students succeed, and (e) having a sense of self confidence in their classroom teaching. Being compared to the former teacher was an event that had the least impact.

Table 3

Impact of Selected Events Upon the Teaching Experience of 1999-2001 Beginning Teachers

Selected Events	1999-2001			1999			2000			2001		
	M	SD	Rnk	M	SD	Rnk	M	SD	Rnk	M	SD	Rnk
I feel in control of my program	4.53	0.62	1	4.74	0.44	1	4.41	0.67	1	4.42	0.67	2
My principal supports me	4.44	0.69	2	4.65	0.56	2	4.31	0.65	3	4.33	0.89	4
I experience satisfaction when an activity succeeds	4.42	0.71	3	4.61	0.57	3	4.28	0.78	4	4.42	0.67	2
Students act with respect towards me	4.40	0.68	4	4.57	0.77	4	4.21	0.62	5	4.50	0.52	1
I see my students succeeding in my class	4.39	0.63	5	4.52	0.58	6	4.38	0.67	2	4.17	0.58	6
I feel self-confident in my classroom teaching	4.27	0.80	6	4.57	0.65	4	4.10	0.80	8	4.08	0.90	9
My students show pride in their accomplishments	4.17	0.68	7	4.17	0.64	13	4.21	0.71	5	4.08	0.67	9
My peers act with respect towards me	4.17	0.75	7	4.26	0.74	11	4.14	0.73	7	4.00	0.60	16
The subject matter I teach is already familiar to me	4.17	0.68	7	4.30	0.62	10	4.10	0.76	8	4.17	0.72	6
I have more work to do than I have time to do it	4.16	0.96	10	4.35	0.87	8	3.97	1.03	11	4.25	0.87	5
I receive positive feedback from my students	4.09	0.77	11	4.17	0.82	13	4.03	0.76	10	4.08	0.67	9
I have sufficient funds for supplies and equipment	4.06	0.97	12	4.32	0.82	9	3.90	1.03	15	4.00	0.95	16
I receive positive feedback from my peers	4.03	0.76	13	4.14	0.69	16	3.97	0.81	11	4.00	0.74	16
I have obtained the goals that I set for myself	4.03	0.82	13	4.09	0.88	20	3.93	0.75	13	4.17	0.83	6
Local businesses provide support for my program	4.02	0.77	15	4.17	0.64	13	3.86	0.82	18	4.08	0.79	9
I see my students working to have better future	4.00	0.80	16	4.22	0.78	12	3.79	0.76	22	4.08	0.79	9
I receive expressions of gratitude from my students	3.98	0.83	17	4.04	0.75	21	3.89	0.94	17	4.08	0.67	9
My job allows me to be creative	3.95	0.84	18	4.39	0.64	7	3.66	0.88	26	3.83	0.72	19
I have inadequate curriculum materials	3.92	1.12	19	3.91	1.32	23	3.86	1.04	18	4.08	0.79	9
Job tasks that I am doing are already familiar to me	3.91	0.79	20	4.13	0.74	17	3.79	0.80	22	3.75	0.75	21

Table 3 (continued)

Selected Events	1999-2001			1999			2000			2001		
	M	SD	Rnk	M	SD	Rnk	M	SD	Rnk	M	SD	Rnk
I receive positive feedback from my principal	3.89	0.86	21	4.13	0.95	17	3.83	0.75	20	3.58	0.79	23
My students participate in vocational club activities	3.87	0.89	22	4.13	0.61	17	3.75	0.87	24	3.67	1.23	22
I have inadequate equipment	3.78	1.08	23	3.83	1.05	26	3.93	0.91	13	3.33	1.37	32
My students display a lack of self-discipline	3.77	0.79	24	3.91	0.83	24	3.72	0.83	25	3.58	0.51	23
I have inadequate facilities (classroom, lab, etc)	3.70	1.22	25	3.74	1.33	29	3.90	1.09	15	3.17	1.11	35
I have to do recruitment activities for my program	3.61	1.15	26	3.83	0.92	27	3.46	1.09	29	3.55	1.63	26
I am taking classes to further my education	3.61	1.11	26	3.82	1.27	28	3.38	1.06	31	3.80	0.63	20
My class sizes are not appropriate for my subject	3.59	1.29	28	3.57	1.25	32	3.83	1.31	20	3.08	1.16	36
My home life is negatively affected by my teaching and/or administrators	3.59	1.38	28	3.87	1.33	25	3.48	1.28	27	3.33	1.61	32
My program is misunderstood by parents, students, counselors, and/or administrators	3.58	1.14	30	3.96	1.12	22	3.41	1.07	30	3.25	1.14	34
My students act unmotivated towards my subject area	3.56	0.92	31	3.74	0.79	29	3.48	0.93	27	3.42	1.08	30
I have had success using new teaching approaches	3.49	0.88	32	3.74	0.90	29	3.25	0.91	33	3.58	0.51	23
Receive help from my local voc. director	3.30	1.27	33	3.32	1.26	34	3.19	1.31	34	3.55	1.13	26
Problems occur due to poor organizational skills	3.19	1.37	34	2.87	1.45	39	3.38	1.16	31	3.36	1.57	31
I have trouble making and sequencing lesson plans	3.16	1.22	35	3.14	1.32	35	3.04	1.12	36	3.50	1.17	29
I receive help from my state vocational supervisor	3.14	1.20	36	3.48	1.14	33	2.72	1.17	39	3.55	1.04	26
Problems occur due to misunderstanding of school policies or procedures	3.06	1.34	37	3.04	1.33	36	3.14	1.33	35	2.92	1.38	38
Problems because of unclear job expectations	2.94	1.28	38	2.96	1.37	37	2.86	1.22	38	3.08	1.24	36
I am compared to the former teacher in this program	2.81	1.28	39	2.91	1.41	38	2.90	1.21	37	2.42	1.08	39
Mean Score	3.81			3.96			3.73			3.75		

Note: Impact Scale: 1=None, 2=Minor, 3=Moderate, 4=Major, 5=Critical.

Though the number of events rated as critical decreased among the cohorts, the respective percentages of events having a critical or major impact for the 1999, 2000, and 2001 cohorts were 72.1% (n=31), 66.7% (n=26), and 74.5% (n=29). Common selected events from the three cohorts that had a major or critical impact on the experience included: (a) feeling in control of my program, (b) my principal supports me, (c) I experience satisfaction when an activity succeeds, and (d) students act with respect toward me. Responses provided by the participants of the three cohorts reveal that 17.9% (n=7), 33.3 (n=13), and 23.1% (n=9), respectively, of the events had a moderate impact.

Data in Table 4 reflect the mean impact values of the selected events when placed into the categories of the Teacher Proximity Continuum (Heath-Camp et al., 1992). Except for the Events within the community category in 2000 and program category in 2001 which had a moderate impact, the data in Table 4 reveal that all categories of events for each year had a major impact upon the teaching experience of the beginning teachers.

Table 4

Impact of Selected Events Within Categories of the Teacher Proximity Continuum as Experienced by 1999-2001 Beginning Agricultural Education Teachers

Categories of the TPC	No. of Items	1999-2001 (N=64)		1999 (N=23)		2000 (N=29)		2001 (N=12)	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Peers	2	4.10	0.75	4.20	0.71	4.03	0.78	4.08	0.73
Student	7	4.00	0.78	4.12	0.77	3.91	0.79	3.98	0.70
Curriculum	1	3.92	1.12	3.91	1.32	3.86	1.04	4.08	0.79
Internal	7	3.85	0.97	4.06	0.93	3.72	0.95	3.77	0.89
Pedagogy	8	3.81	0.91	3.92	0.86	3.73	0.88	3.76	0.91
System	8	3.68	1.08	3.79	1.05	3.63	1.08	3.60	1.05
Program	4	3.67	1.15	3.84	1.10	3.68	1.04	3.32	1.33
Community	2	3.58	0.98	3.83	0.89	3.29	1.00	3.81	0.91
Mean		3.81		3.96		3.73		3.75	

Note: ¹Impact Scale: 1=None, 2=Minor, 3=Moderate, 4=Major, 5=Critical.

CONCLUSIONS

Teacher preparation programming addresses the needs of teachers from the time they initially enter the preservice program until they complete their teaching career. This census study focused on three cohorts of entry-level teachers who were initiating their teaching career. It compared the frequency and impact of selected events regarded to affect the teaching experience of beginning teachers (Heath-Camp, Camp, Adams-Casmus, Talbert, & Barber, 1992). Findings from this study provided the researchers with the information for formulating four conclusions.

1. The frequency of occurrence of the selected events was different for each cohort of beginning teachers. Even though different, over 90% of the events were experienced often or occasionally by the teachers. The beginning teachers experienced success quite often during the first six to eight weeks of teaching even though they carried a demanding workload. At the same time, they felt their jobs allowed creativity, their peers and students were respectful, and their principals were supportive. The differences in occurrence may be partially explained by differences in the backgrounds of the teachers, preservice preparation experiences, curricular emphasis of their programs, characteristics and activities of their colleagues, school environments, and the nature of the activities of administrators (Fessler & Christensen, 1992).
2. The ratings of the beginning teachers indicated that selected events which reflected teaching experiences, activities, or actions did, indeed, impact their initial teaching experience. Nearly 80% of the events had a major or critical impact. The teaching experience of the beginning teachers were most impacted by events, in order, related to peers, students, curriculum, self (internal), and pedagogy (Heath-Camp, Camp, Adams-Casmus, Talbert & Barber, 1992). Having a sense of being in control of their program had a critical impact upon their experience. Events which had a major impact included experiencing the support of the principal, receiving respect from students, feeling of satisfaction from successful activities, students being successful, and being self-confident in their classroom teaching.
3. The order of the events that had a major impact upon the teaching experience of the beginning teachers differed by cohort. This finding supports earlier findings that suggests the needs and experiences of beginning teachers differ and should be accommodated in unique ways to meet the needs of each cohort of teachers (Claycomb & Petty, 1983; Birkenholz & Harbstreit, 1987; Joerger, 2002).
4. Use of the Teacher Proximity Continuum to categorize the events of this questionnaire requires further development before sound conclusions can be constructed. The findings of this investigation seem to suggest, however, that the combined cohorts of beginning teachers most frequently experienced events, in order, relating to peers, internal (self), and students. Heath-Camp et al. (1992) found the greatest share of significant events for beginning career and technical education teachers (e.g., business, family and consumer science, marketing education, technology education) were related to the student, system, and program categories of the Teacher Proximity Continuum. Differences in the findings of these two studies may reflect the difference in the program areas and characteristics of the teachers involved in the two studies.

Nearly all categories of events had a major impact upon the teachers. Events relating to students, peers and internal considerations affected the experience of the beginning teachers the most. Teachers were least impacted by events relating to the community, program, and system. These results support findings reported by other researchers (Fuller, 1969; Ryan, 1986; Waters, 1988,

Moir, 1990, Fessler & Christensen, 1992) that indicate beginning teachers initially address concerns relating to self before expanding their concerns to teaching tasks, and finally ways to impact student learning and the related school and community systems.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since most of the teachers were transitioning from their recent preservice college preparation experiences into their initial teaching jobs, the findings and conclusions of this study may have implications for a number of audiences. The audiences include the teacher educators of the institutions that prepared the beginning teachers, state agricultural education supervisory staff members who work with the beginning teachers, professional organizations who support new members, school administrators who organize local induction activities for beginning agricultural education teachers, and the staff of the statewide Agricultural Education Teacher Induction Program (TIP). The results and conclusions of the study resulted in four recommendations for practice.

1. Given that differences in impact exist between individuals and cohorts, individuals responsible for working with beginning teachers need to know the nature of events that impact beginning teachers. Information can be gained through personal interviews and administration of assessments such as used in this study. Local school principals, staff development specialists, leaders within professional organizations, induction program coordinators, and agricultural education state staff need to be mindful of the events and be involved in addressing the concerns, challenges, and problems (e.g., events) of the beginning teachers by supporting and offering access to programmatic teacher induction in-service activities and programs (Heath-Camp, Camp, Adams-Casmus, Talbert, & Barber, 1992).
2. The events found to have a major or critical impact should be used to shape the content of in-service education programs for the beginning teachers. Results of this study reveal that ways of relating to peers, curriculum, strategies for dealing with internal questions, and effective ways of interacting with students do impact the experience of the beginning teachers. Moreover, beginning teachers should be made aware of the events before they start teaching so they can make adjustments to optimize their personal experiences.
3. Teacher educators from the teacher education programs represented by graduates participating in this study may find the results useful. Discussions and exercises that teach teachers how to maximize the positive and minimize the negative impact of the selected events are recommended. Entry-level and preservice teachers need to gain and maintain control of their classrooms and programs, and enlist support and respect from their principal and peers. Additionally, they must learn how to earn the respect of their students by designing and implementing successful activities that lead to successful student learning experiences.

The responsibilities and expectations of beginning agricultural education and other career and technical education teachers are different from most classroom teachers (Heath-Camp et al, 1992). In addition to advising the FFA and implementing effective work-based learning programs, teachers are expected to teach classroom and laboratory courses that also integrate academic subjects through a variety learning activities that are supported by sound theory. As a result, the induction processes and events are likely more complex for entry-level agricultural education teachers than most teachers. Researchers, therefore, need to:

1. Determine how the nature and impact of the events change as these beginning teachers progress through the steps of various models of the induction process (Huberman, 1993; Waters, 1988; Ryan, 1986);
2. Further develop and refine the subscales of the Teacher Proximity Continuum. Views of experienced principals, mentors, professional organization leaders, and state staff who have observed the entry-level teachers should then be compared with the perceptions of the beginning teachers; and
3. Identify influencers that affect the order of impact of the items and categories of the Teacher Proximity Continuum for different cohorts of entry-level teachers (Camp & Heath-Camp, 1992).

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