

STUDENT TEACHING AND THE TEACHER WORK SAMPLE: PERCEPTIONS OF BOTH
STUDENT TEACHERS AND COOPERATING TEACHERS

by

Robert J. Redmon, Gayle Mullen, and John Schreiber

Midwestern State University

3410 Taft Blvd

Wichita Falls, TX 76308

bob.redmon@mwsu.edu

Presented at the 31st Annual Meeting of the Southwest Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, February 6-9, 2008.

The full text of this paper may be obtained by emailing your request to bob.redmon@mwsu.edu

Abstract: Student teachers and cooperating teachers were asked to comment on the value of student teaching and the Teacher Work Sample and to elaborate on ways these experiences might influence the student teachers' dispositions and practice following student teaching. The results were mixed, but suggest that many student teachers and cooperating teachers feel university supervision of student teaching is not necessary or helpful and the required documentation (the Teacher Work Sample) burdensome and confusing.

STUDENT TEACHING AND THE TEACHER WORK SAMPLE: PERCEPTIONS OF BOTH
STUDENT TEACHERS AND COOPERATING TEACHERS

Recent emphasis on accountability has forced teacher preparation programs to develop more valid and reliable ways to evaluate the new teachers they have prepared. Over the years, many methods of measuring the effectiveness of teachers have appeared. Some have flourished, and others were rapidly forgotten. Traditionally, these evaluations have been based upon direct observation by trained supervisors and, in recent years, students' standardized test scores gained rather dubious acceptance as an indicator of teacher quality. The Teacher Work Sample (TWS) offers a more direct approach to measuring teacher efficacy. Though the logic and measurement mechanism that defines the TWS are commonly used by the most effective teachers to inform their personal teaching decisions, these methods have not traditionally been part of any formal evaluation of teacher performance. Prior to the appearance of the Teacher Work Sample, few strategies used to evaluate teacher performance have attempted to measure what was actually learned by students as a result of the teacher's efforts.

The Teacher Work Sample concept was originally developed in 1987 at Western Oregon University in an attempt to better evaluate the effectiveness of its teacher preparation program and its teacher candidates (Schalock, 1998). This method of holding teacher candidates accountable for their pupils' learning has since earned a large and growing following among teacher preparation programs in other states (Devlin-Scherer, Daly, Burroughs, & McCartan, 2007).

The Teacher Work Sample (TWS), as defined by the Renaissance Project for Improving Teacher Quality (2007), is an exhibit of teaching performance, providing "direct evidence of a (teacher) candidate's ability to design and implement standards-based instruction, assess student

learning, and reflect on the teaching and learning process.” Teacher work samples are presented as credible evidence of a teacher candidate’s ability to facilitate student learning. The TWS is essentially a form of action research. The TWS report includes the following sections:

Contextual factors, learning goal, assessment plan, instructional design, instructional decision making, analysis of student learning, and reflection. Teacher candidates first describe the students involved and the physical, social, cultural, and instructional environments within which the instruction will occur. Next, they identify an appropriate instructional goal and design a method of measuring the extent to which students meet that goal. Then they design appropriate instructional activities. After the lesson has been taught and the assessment completed, the teacher reflects upon the results and their implications for future teaching.

Denner, Salzman, and Harris (2002) found the TWS to be a valid and reliable assessment of teacher effectiveness. However, for this to be the case, the TWS must be more than a one shot assessment, one forgotten almost immediately upon completion. It cannot be just one more hurdle for teacher candidates to clear before becoming certified. In order for the TWS to influence future teaching effectiveness, the teacher candidate, the cooperating teacher, and all agents of the College of Education must value and understand the TWS process and its most important outcome: to encourage the systematic professional growth of new teachers both as they enter the profession and throughout their teaching careers. These perceptions and their implications for colleges of education form the focus of this study.

Theoretical Framework

Prior research related to the student teaching and the TWS has been limited in scope, focusing primarily on the validity and reliability of the TWS as a method of holding candidates accountable for their pupils’ learning during instruction. In at least two studies, however,

researchers described how candidates approached the various sections of the TWS. For instance, Devlin-Scherer et al. (2007) interviewed eight secondary teaching candidates about their perceptions of the TWS contextual factors section and how these perceptions impacted their decision making about what and how to teach. In the researchers' opinions, the reflective element appeared to be the most powerful tool in the TWS process. In a similar study, Keese and Brown (2003) asked candidates to complete open-ended questions related to how they made teaching decisions in five areas: major concepts to teach, inclusion of contextual factors in planning, types of activities to use, adaptations to instruction, and determining learning gains. Keese and Brown found that when candidates completed their TWS, their teaching decisions focused more on standards and student needs and less on demographics or physical condition.

An area of TWS research that appears to have been neglected is the value that candidates and their cooperating teachers find in preparing and completing a TWS during student teaching. Unless teacher candidates and cooperating teachers place a high value on the TWS, it is unlikely that they will put much effort into its preparation or be inclined to use the processes learned from the TWS in the future. Value for a task is an important factor in students' motivation. Eccles & Wigfield (1985) suggest that if students can see the relevance in what they are doing and that relevance is combined with feelings of self efficacy, then motivation for a learning task is increased. However, if the task threatens a person's self-esteem in any way or if the task is such that it may require extreme amounts of effort, impinging upon pre-existing needs and priorities, then the task will most likely be avoided. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe the way both student teachers and cooperating teachers valued and perceived the TWS and student teaching.

Methods

Five student teachers and four cooperating teachers situated in a mid-size city in the Southwest United States were interviewed about their participation in the student teaching process and the preparation of the TWS. The interviews focused on candidates' preparation for teaching, relationships with cooperating teacher and pupils, and their experience with the TWS. Student teachers were also asked to discuss how they believed the TWS influencing their current and future teaching. Interviews were transcribed and then read recursively by three researchers. Each researcher examined transcripts for emerging themes based on the research questions and then collaboratively summarized the contents of the interview transcripts.

Cooperating Teacher Interviews

To the chagrin of the researchers, two of whom were members of the college's student teaching committee, the cooperating teachers interviewed demonstrated an almost total lack of awareness and reported little interest or involvement in the their student teacher's TWS. However, once the TWS process had been explained to them fully by the interviewer, most seemed supportive of the concept. Following are summaries of the interviews of four cooperating teachers who supervised student teachers as they completed their TWS. Each narrative is prefaced by a brief professional biography of the cooperating teacher.

Martha: The Teacher Work What?

Martha is a middle school science teacher with over 20 years of experience. She is considered a master teacher by her colleagues and her building administrators and is regularly asked to mentor student teachers.

Though Martha is an alumni and strong supporter of the university

and its teacher preparation program, she does not consider either perfect. The main flaw she reported in the student teaching experience was the relatively brief length of time the student teacher is in a classroom (Each student teacher has two 6 week placements.). She complained that she does not get to know her student teachers well enough to make a recommendation about their student teaching grade in the six weeks that they spend with her. “They come in, they observe for a week, they begin taking over, and (boom) they have not even learned the kids’ names, and they’re out the door.” Earlier in her career, Martha had student teachers for 12 week placements and felt that the extended placement made more sense and allowed the student teachers to become more fully integrated into the classroom and have a more realistic teaching experience. She felt much more confident and competent completing evaluation forms after a 12 week placement. Martha believes most student teachers fail to build professional relationships with teachers other than their cooperating teacher and that a 12 week placement allows more time for that to happen.

When asked directly about the Teacher Work Sample (TWS), Martha was initially stumped. It was obvious that she was only vaguely aware that it was a requirement and completely oblivious to the importance that the teacher preparation program now gives it. Her first response to a question about her most current student teaching experience was to complain that her last student teacher (the only one she has hosted since the TWS requirement was instituted) really didn’t communicate with her very well. “I didn’t get a lot; there wasn’t a lot of communication.” “I would say here this is ...Read through it; come back to me. What do you think?” She concluded that since he was “from a different culture, he was more inclined to go to male teachers” with his questions. “Even though he could see us (the other science teachers)

collaborating as a department where we would all come together and bounce ideas about, he wouldn't include himself in the group when we would try to include him."

Martha became somewhat defensive when she realized she should have been more involved in supervising her student teacher's TWS. "What hurt was that I did not know what teaching experiences I needed to make sure they had." "It's very general in the [student teaching] handbook, what experiences they need... "If I knew as a teacher, I could set some of those things up."

The interviewer explained the nature of the TWS and what the student would likely have done that she might recognize. Only then did Martha begin to remember some things that were related to her student teacher's TWS. Her response was not particularly encouraging:

The first time I heard about it was probably his third week here, and he said, "I need to do a pretest and a posttest." And I went "Ok." So it kind of took me off guard and when I say... he had a very thick accent... and when I tried to get more from him, I couldn't really..." I don't like surprises from my student teachers.

"Oh! I have to give a pretest and a post test." "Oh really!" That was kind of hard, for we were in the middle of a unit.

Martha seemed to resent the fact her student teacher had thrust something upon her that she was not expecting or prepared for. She strongly recommended that the Student Teaching Handbook provide more specificity and detail about what is required of student teachers, including a more complete description of the TWS, as she was unfamiliar with it prior to our interview. She also requested that the College of Education provide a cooperating teacher orientation, during which these things could be explained. Martha expressed a need to be the expert when dealing with a student teacher and that she was not going to be comfortable following the lead of a student

teacher. More information “up front” would better prepare her to assume the role of expert and help her feel more confident in her interaction with student teachers.

When asked if the student teacher had ever solicited advice or assistance related to the TWS, Martha’s response made it clear that she felt her student teacher was rather abrupt and presumptuous:

He came to me and said, “I need some information about the school.” I said, “What kind of information? I mean there is tons of data that I can give you about the school.” So he typed me up a sheet, gave me a list of what he needed. I looked up the information for him, and I said, “Here’s the information. This is where it came from; this is why that’s there,” and I answered his questions. He didn’t seem to want to discuss it, and he did not even ask how I used that information, didn’t ask what would that tell me as a teacher. There wasn’t any discussion there.

Martha was obviously uncomfortable with the TWS process and showed concern that the student teacher was manipulating the results because he was reluctant to share them with her. Martha explained that the student teacher had made a spread sheet of the results, and that when she was eventually allowed to review it, the post test scores seemed not to agree with what she had observed in the classroom. The post test scores on his spread sheet demonstrated significant learning, but Martha was convinced the students had not learned much during the lesson, certainly not as much as the scores suggested. “So I was really concerned that...to make sure that the data was showing what I was seeing in the classroom.”

Another concern Martha voiced was about her student teacher’s request for copies of student work to be included as evidence in his TWS. He apparently failed to explain what student work he needed or how it would be used.

He said, “I need student work.” ...I said, “Can I see something in writing, because I am obviously not understanding what you want?” I said, “That’s a privacy issue.”

He didn’t seem to understand that part.

Even with her obvious misgivings about this particular student teacher and the TWS he developed while in her classroom, Martha remained supportive of the idea and the goals of the TWS, especially the reflective component.

I see a lot of value in it, especially the reflection... When you teach a class, how do you know if they learn...? You need to reflect on this... I’d like to read that part of his Work Sample. I told him I keep a journal myself, especially when it is something... like a new lesson I teach. I reflect on how I did it... weaknesses... how I could do it better. He never let me read his reflection.

When asked whether student teaching and the TWS in particular might influence her student teachers’ teaching in the future, she cautiously agreed that she thought it could,

...especially if it’s, maybe... even if it’s only one lesson that they know is a lesson that works...they know that it’s something that they can put in their bag of tricks to pull out and really shine on. I think if they have a really good lesson, that could give them confidence to use that as a sample to make other good lessons. So I think it is a tool that they can use to better themselves.

In the end, Martha regretted never having been allowed to see her student teacher’s finished TWS. She explained that she would have loved to have integrated it into her final evaluation. She had a distinct sense that she would have valued her student teacher’s TWS more than he: “It didn’t seem that important to him.” In fact, Martha didn’t believe the student teacher saw much value in any part of student teaching, including the TWS. She felt that he just wanted to put in his time, get

his grade, and move on. Martha didn't think this particular student teacher learned much about teaching while he was in her classroom.

Amanda: I Never Really Heard about It

At the time of the interview, Amanda had taught 3rd grade, self contained, for 10 years. She had been assigned a student teacher each semester for the three semesters prior to her interview.

When asked about the teacher work sample, Amanda commented that though each of her student teachers had a different personality and different responsibilities outside of student teaching, one had a particularly hard time with the amount of paper work (the TWS) required by the university. This student teacher was a young mother. Amanda reported that this young lady "cried a lot" and complained about the heavy burden.

The other two, according to Amanda, were single. They never complained and did not seem to have any trouble with the paperwork required. They all completed the paperwork (TWS) and, Amanda says, "I really never heard about it."

Like Martha, Amanda complained about the 6 week placement and felt a longer period would permit more independent teaching and allow the student teacher more time to adapt to the students and classroom. She also believed, even though it didn't seem such a burden to two of her three student teachers, that they were asked to do too much "paperwork" for the university, especially the elaborate lesson plans and the TWS. She felt as though the student teachers blamed her for the burden.

Other than the complaints, Amada remembered very little about her student teachers' TWS projects. She did notice that her third student teacher gave a pre-test and aligned all her lessons with the pre-test and then kept track of her students' progress. Amanda explained that she

appreciated the progress records and had used them on her first term report cards. Other than that, the only time she heard about the TWS was in the teacher's lounge when the other student teachers in the building were talking about them. None of her student teachers asked her for any advice, approval, or help, or even mentioned the assignment by name, even though she debriefed each of them daily after the students were dismissed. Amanda had never seen a finished teacher work sample and did not remember receiving any information about it from the university; however, she suggested that what she had believed were long lesson plans may have actually been a teacher work sample.

Toward the end of the interview, like Martha, Amanda requested some specific guidelines from the university so she could offer assistance and advice to future student teachers. Also, toward the end of the interview, Amanda seemed to begin to understand the purpose of the TWS and became very interested, especially in the way it represented (integrated) everything that the student teachers were supposed to be learning in student teaching.

Mickey: Learning from Others

Mickey has been a middle school social studies teacher and coach since 1979. Although the decision to coach was made by his principal rather than by Mickey, he believes that he has been successful at both teaching and coaching. His first love is teaching, however. During the interview, Mickey emphasized the many changes he has made in his teaching approach during the past 27 years, many of which he attributes to student teachers he has mentored. He emphasized his desire to continue to learn about teaching and to pass on what he had learned to others. "I want new and creative ways. I want to be an old dog who learns new tricks." Mickey also learns from his colleagues:

I mean, the kids always knew like clockwork what we were going to do. We had that routine and never varied from it, and [then] I saw her [a teacher in his building who won a national teaching award] and man, she was like a shotgun. . . .What I realized was she was reaching different kids with different things...and that's what I do with my student teachers. I try to show them everything; uhh...every single different way that I teach and then tell them, "Take what works for you. Don't use the things that don't work for you."

Unlike Amanda and Martha, Mickey was somewhat familiar with the Teacher Work Sample assignment. He was also quite impressed with his last student teacher, Eileen, who had completed her TWS while teaching his students and had been very innovative in her approach. "She created some games and was just off the chart. Of all my student teachers, she kept the kids most engaged." Though Eileen showed him her notes and evaluations, he did not focus on these things because, as he understood it, "It wasn't for a grade."

Mickey argued that doing the TWS was important for student teachers because it helps them to understand "why they're doing it...why we teach what we teach."

Susan: TWS Takes Away from Their Teaching

Susan is a veteran kindergarten teacher with over 30 years teaching experience who had been at her current school for more than 11 years at the time of her interview. She had previously worked in rural schools and had never been assigned a student teacher before taking her current position.

At the beginning of the interview, Susan said she had "never had a bad experience with student teachers... they all seem very well prepared, more than willing to just step right in..." She seemed very enthusiastic and went on to explain that the normal student teaching process, as it is described in the student teaching manual, does not apply to kindergarten and that she put her

student teachers to work right away, on the first day. “I’ve never had one that didn’t want to just jump right in and do that...you know...and that’s really encouraging to me.”

Susan seemed to resent the intrusion of both the university supervisor and the formal assignments required of student teachers. She complained that it “traumatized” both herself and her student teachers when they “hovered around.” She explained that, although they were always friendly and helpful, she felt they were “looking over her shoulder,” and that made her uncomfortable. Sometimes the university supervisor would “break down” her student teacher, usually when critiquing the student teacher’s classroom management techniques. Apparently, Susan enjoys a more unstructured classroom than most university supervisors.

Like the other cooperating teachers, Susan was concerned about the change from one to two placements during student teaching:

And that’s really hard because especially if they...uhhh,- start out in kindergarten and then they go like to first and second and my children will see them and they’ll go, “Why aren’t they with us anymore?” and...ummm...and a lot of times they want to stay in kindergarten.

Susan explained that she wished she were able to talk to the university supervisor before the student teacher’s evaluation, so that she could explain kindergarten decorum and her expectations. Susan seemed to feel any criticism of her student teacher was really a critique of her teaching and an attack on her authority. She feels this is unfair because “they probably have never taught kindergarten.” “I mean,” she goes on, “you know...they probably know early childhood, but it’s different than actually...you know...day in day out.” She believes this is especially true of university faculty who are acting as supervisors. She seemed much more accepting of retired teachers who are hired as adjuncts to supervise student teachers, describing

them as much more “encouraging.” She suggested that student teachers should be treated in much the same manner as she treats her kindergarten students. “You know, all the things we’re supposed to do with kids. You know, how you are supposed to say all the good things and then slide in the bad things?”

When asked about her experience with the Teacher Work Sample, Susan again found fault with university supervision and evaluation, complaining that it was very stressful for the student teachers to do during student teaching, and that “sometimes it’s not even what they can use in class.” She feels that the TWS is much too “massive,” that it “takes away from their student teaching,” and that it is an oppressive “drain” on them. She suggested that the TWS might be done either before or after student teaching, maybe in one of their regular classes.

Although Susan was apparently aware of the TWS assignment, she claimed that none of her student teachers had ever asked her about it or requested her help. Also, the TWS had never come up in her conferences with university supervisors. She added further that she had never seen a completed TWS, even though she knew her student teachers were working on them. She had observed them working on “something” on the computer during conference period, but assumed they did most of the TWS at home after student teaching. After the interviewer explained the TWS process, she admitted she had been aware of the pre and post testing, but did not realize they were related to the TWS. She also claimed to have approved all of the lessons taught by her student teachers. She seemed to think the TWS was just another library research paper or some kind of elaborate personal reflection. Susan admitted that, like other cooperating teachers interviewed for this study, she had learned all she knew about the TWS by eavesdropping on conversations in the teachers’ lounge and in the hall. Although she had heard

them complaining about the TWS, she explained that “it was their work,” and “everybody complains about their work.”

Susan “loved” all her student teachers and seemed very protective of them. She bragged that they were very well prepared. However, she consistently insisted that the university should not burden them with things like lesson plans or the TWS during student teaching and that university supervisors should be less intrusive and more understanding of student teachers and the “reality of the classroom.”

Student Teacher Interviews

Many of the student teachers who were interviewed made it clear that they did not value the TWS as a tool, complained that it took too much time, and denied that it might inform or enhance their future teaching. Instead, they viewed the TWS as an onerous task perpetrated on them by the university as one more way to make their lives miserable. Others praised the TWS for the way it organized their teaching and documented their skills. Few found their cooperating teachers helpful either in guiding their student teaching or doing their TWS. Several of the students echoed the cooperating teachers in condemning multiple 6 week placements in student teaching.

Sandy: I Don't Have Time for This!

Sandy has always been a teacher, even as a young child. She remembers taking home extra worksheets from elementary school so that she could teach her brother. Although she briefly thought she might become a writer, because of her role tutoring students in junior high and high school and becoming known as the “math mom” to her science team members, Sandy eventually concluded that teaching was her calling.

Sandy expressed no uncertainty about becoming a teacher, but she was concerned about finding a good job. Sandy described a good job as one where faculty and students become like a second family. Sandy was a traditional, resident student and a secondary math education major. At the time of the interview, she was student teaching in a large urban high school.

Sandy described her cooperating teacher as very supportive and helpful. At first, she felt like a failure because students were not doing the work, but she later realized that some students were “just not motivated.” She taught several sections of Algebra I and Pre Calculus and noted how different the students’ personalities were and how difficult it was to motivate them. Though she was confident in her content knowledge and ability to plan lessons, she was often frustrated by her students’ failure to do assignments. She believes this was related to their own frustration with the content of the course, which she described as being “all about passing the TAKS.” Students in her pre-calculus class were somewhat more motivated. Although some students still questioned the relevance of some of the work they were assigned, they usually did their assignments. Because excessive absence was routinely excused and nothing was done when students forgot their books, Sandy came to believe that the administration in her school did not support student learning.

Sandy explained that she was a person who likes to stay ahead and, therefore, got started on her teacher work sample right away and worked at it steadily until it was finished. However, she also questioned whether the teacher work sample has a place in day to day teaching. She worried that she would not have time to do this sort of thing on a day-to-day basis.

Sandy mentioned that, among the other student teachers, the teacher work sample had earned a decidedly negative reputation. She thought this may have been because “it is a big, scary, difficult project.” “They (other student teachers) talk about it as if a great weight has been lifted off them when they finish it.” Sandy’s comments mirrored this sentiment.

After giving the pretest that was required by her teacher work sample, Sandy discovered that some students knew a lot more than she thought they would. This worried her because then she had to decide what to do about it. She then talked to students individually and tried to find other things for them to do. Sandy saw this as the most valuable part of the TWS.

Sandy felt that student teaching was good for her because she could “see and experience so much more that goes into teaching.” For instance, she was surprised to learn how difficult is to get students who need help to ask for it. She also learned that making personal connections with students was more helpful than many of the other things she did because she could see students getting a little more interested.

After student teaching, Sandy took a position teaching at a school she attended as a student—the one where faculty and students seem like family.

David: TWS Was a Negative Distracter

At the time of the interview, David was an older, non-traditional college student looking for a second career. He is recently retired after 24 years in the highway patrol. He remembers school fondly and believes he had very good teachers when he was a child. David remembers many of the things he did in school and the ways his teachers taught and believes it is important that schools go back to the “old style” of teaching, “where we interact with our students more...and don’t depend upon just handout sheets to do our teaching.” David believes “if you aren’t learning, you aren’t living.”

David decided to become a teacher partly as a result of 16 years working with youth groups in high school and junior high. He saw “how the students really appreciate their teachers and how they help them.” He believes children need someone who listens to them and that teachers (he) could be that someone. David describes himself as very patient and tolerant. When he was young,

his parents and teachers encouraged him to become a teacher, and recently, after substitute teaching for 6 years, he decided to heed their advice and become a full time teacher. David, like so many others who choose the teaching profession, “wants to make a difference.”

David found the TWS “very strenuous.” He did his student teaching in a very small school where he taught science to students in five different grade levels (4-8), requiring him to create several lesson plans a week. Many of his students were at risk or had special needs, complicating his planning. He began every morning at 5:30 and, even after a full day at school, often worked until 10:30 or so getting things ready for the next day and working on his teacher work sample. David admitted that he tries very hard, sometimes too hard, and proudly boasts that his cooperating teacher called him a perfectionist.

David was his cooperating teacher’s first student teacher, and felt she really did not understand the TWS assignment or the support and guidance he needed as a student teacher. He explained that she was very little help with the teacher work sample or lesson planning; however, he was quick to demonstrate his understanding and make excuses for her. Apparently, David’s university supervisor wasn’t any more help than his cooperating teacher when it came to his teacher work sample. The only thing he remembered were her reminders of its due date.

David saw the TWS as a negative distracter. He believed he should have been allowed to take notes during his student teaching and then write the TWS document after student teaching. He resented the time that writing the teacher work sample took away from his other planning chores. His TWS document was 49 pages long. However, he did see its benefits, especially that it made him concentrate on the process and the decision making involved. He suggested to the interviewer that professors should have done more to prepare him to do the teacher work sample, but admitted

that he did not ask for any assistance from his professors, feeling that seeking such assistance when not a current student was not appropriate.

Overall, David was very complimentary of his professors and the teacher preparation program in general and believes he is very well prepared to be an effective teacher. Ironically, after condemning it as a negative detractor, he expressed tremendous pride in his completed teacher work sample, but when asked how he thought doing the teacher work sample would influence his teaching in the future, he repeatedly avoided answering. I suspect that the teacher work sample does not offer a good fit in the “old style” of teaching that David so fondly remembers and so fervently wishes to recreate for his students.

Julie: If It Is Not for a Grade, It's a Waste of Time!

Julie was a non-traditional, post baccalaureate student with a degree in Organic Biology. After getting married, she returned to college to become certified to teach grades PreK-4. She decided to become a teacher because of her love of learning and her awareness that most people have “no concept of scientific rule at all” and “for the little ones so that they wouldn't be just completely turned off from science and afraid of science as they got older.” Her overall goal is to share her love “of not only science, but just learning in general, to people that might not view it the same way that I do.” Julie's interest in science began as a young girl visiting her grandparents who owned ten acres of land near Henrietta. During visits to her grandparents' home, she grew curious about all forms of nature, including plants, animals, and the constellations. By the time she was in seventh grade, she knew she wanted to be someone with a title that ended in “...ologist, such as a paleontologist, a biologist, or an archeologist.”

Julie's responses to her student teaching experiences and the TWS were almost all negative. She complained that she was assigned to classrooms where she did not want to teach,

did not receive adequate preparation from the University, and that the TWS had limited usefulness, especially since she was not getting a grade for completing it. Though she wanted to student teach in a science (only) classroom, Julie was assigned to PreK and second grade self-contained classrooms. Julie found the PreK experience hard; she described it as a “nightmare,” especially classroom management.

When Julie moved to her second grade assignment, she continued to find classroom management a problem. She felt uncomfortable with her second grade cooperating teacher and complained she was criticized unfairly and in a non constructive manner. One example she gave was the teacher saying, “You did this wrong and you need to fix it,” rather than saying, “Here’s what I would do” or “Here’s what you need to maybe try.” This cooperating teacher encouraged Julie to try her own methods, but warned her that with hands-on experiences, the kids would “get crazy.” Because of this, Julie chose not to use hands-on approaches when teaching the second-graders, something she knew she should do.

Julie indicated that she felt she was used by her cooperating teachers, who frequently left the room without providing the instruction she needed to handle classroom management problems. For instance, one student threw a temper tantrum while the teacher was out of the classroom, apparently a common strategy used by this student. Julie handled the problem, but felt that the teacher should have prepared her in advance for this student’s behavior.

Lack of preparation is a theme that appears consistently in Julie’s interview. When asked about the preparation she received from the University, Julie reported that she had not had the opportunity to work with children younger than third grade during any of her classroom observations. She felt that she was inadequately prepared when she was assigned to student teaching in a PreK classroom. She also suggested that the curriculum focused mainly on early

childhood issues, ignoring the intermediate grades that she was interested in teaching. Julie, had, however, chosen an early childhood through fourth grade teacher certification program. Julie also criticized formal lesson planning. Her cooperating teachers cared little about the lengthy, formal lesson plans required by the University, and neither did she.

Julie's first statement about the Teacher Work Sample was that if it is "going to continue to be a part of the (student teaching) requirement, ... it actually needs to count for something." She found it disheartening to work on the TWS and only get a score that she did not think related to anything. In agreement with others in this study, she suggested that student teaching and the TWS would work better during a twelve-week assignment rather than the six-week one. She expressed the most concern with integrating the TWS with the day to day chores of teaching, saying "...if integrating your work sample, then I think that's good, but you can't always integrate it the way it should be done." For example, Julie completed her TWS while working with the PreK students. She chose to teach fairy tales, which she indicated should be completed over a six week unit, but instead she completed it in three days in order to collect the data required for her TWS. She complained that the students became confused about the fairy tales they were hearing, and argued their confusion was due to the TWS process rather than her decision to teach three fairy tales in three days. She also felt that it was difficult to assess PreK students to determine if they were learning because students were in and out of class every day, and trying to teach everything required and integrate the TWS within that framework was "impossible."

Julie later admitted that the TWS "is not a beast," but insisted that it should be changed in some way so that it worked better with the six-week format of classroom assignments. Additionally, she suggested that the contextual factors element of the TWS be reduced because

student teachers should already know this information. However, Julie later conceded that without the TWS assignment, not all student teachers would take the time to gather the information before starting student teaching. Finally, Julie indicated, “I think it [the TWS] is a valuable assessment tool; [but] I think it should not be drilled into us as much as it is, because by the time we get to actually write the real thing, we’re so...I was so sick of seeing it that I...don’t care anymore.”

Julie’s comments appeared generally negative about student teaching and the entire TWS process. She had much to say about the TWS being unrealistic, hard to get done, and taking too much time. Julie’s position seems to have been influenced by her cooperating teachers. Her first teacher did not know anything about the TWS, but thought it was “just too much to be added on to the student teaching.” The second cooperating teacher had been trained in the TWS process, but Julie had already completed the TWS at that point. This teacher did not voice an opinion about whether she thought the process might help Julie. Julie did not think she would have been a good resource, however, because she had “never found her helpful in any way.”

Surprisingly, when asked if she thought student teaching had been a good experience, Julie said the following:

Yeah. I think that MSU has a great idea with the Blocks and actually having us in there because we’re exposed to even more. I think the teacher work sample would be better suited to a twelve-week assignment, but I really enjoyed having two six-week assignments. So, I think that was good that I actually saw different levels. I know now that I’m capable of teaching PreK, not my favorite thing in the world, but I know I can do it, and I know that I’ll do a good job at it, and the same with second grade, not exactly my cup of tea.

Belinda: TWS - Documents What I Do

Belinda was a non-traditional, post baccalaureate student with considerable experience in school settings. Before deciding to become a public school teacher, she had home schooled her own children, worked in a pre school program, served as a media specialist, and helped out in a special education classroom. She always found great joy in working with children. Immediately after completing her education coursework, she began working as a permanent substitute.

Because of her previous experiences, Belinda was familiar with lesson planning before beginning any of her formal coursework. During her student teaching, she enjoyed trying the various teaching techniques and strategies she had learned from her professional education coursework, even though her cooperating teacher was unfamiliar with many of the things she was doing. “I intentionally tested a classroom management method taught to us at MWSU and put it into action. The teacher did not know this plan and was very reluctant to believe they [the students] would understand it or gain anything from it.”

Like other students interviewed, Belinda occasionally saw her cooperating teacher as an impediment. “My teacher was more of an obstacle than a help in these lessons, but the students responded willingly to my style of teaching, and she soon stepped back and let me complete my work.” She used her TWS to show her cooperating teacher that what she was doing was working. The pre and post tests she administered as part of her TWS project provided “proof positive that all the students gained a great deal of knowledge about the patterns taught starting from very little knowledge.”

Belinda explained that using the TWS helped her document her teaching and her students’ learning in “simple and accessible ways.” She seemed particularly committed to the reflective element of the TWS. She believes the knowledge gained from doing her work sample

allows her to base her lessons “on achievement and locate any weak spots that may need to be taught differently the next time.” She sees the TWS as a way to demonstrate learning and progress to parents and find that the process “highlights (the effect of students’) attendance, attention, and ability to cooperate and function in school environments.” She has also begun to use purposeful data collection and analysis to measure the effectiveness of her attempts to modify student behavior. She believes the most important thing she learned from the TWS project was the value of documenting everything that goes on in her classroom.

Belinda was enthusiastic about the TWS and asserted that many aspects of the TWS will influence the way she teaches throughout her career:

I plan to *always* maintain both a portfolio for my students and checklists for my teaching so that I may hold *myself* accountable for my students’ learning... as well as provide myself with a tool for viewing progress and gaps in my students’ learning. I will continue to assess in standard ways as the school districts dictate, but I also want to be able to document what a student knows in other ways. I believe this accountability to myself and to my students will also provide me with incentives for improving my own practices and sharing my practices with other educators as well as parents.

Belinda’s acceptance and understanding of the TWS concept and its underlying theory may be a reflection of her maturity and extensive prior experience in public education, and it stands in considerable contrast to the responses of other interviewees.

Tracy: TWS - Steps I Can Follow Every Time

Tracy delayed starting college for 8 years after graduating high school. During those 8 years, she “flip-flopped around,” not able to decide what she wanted to do or what she would like to study in college. Though she thought she might want to be an engineer or a forest ranger,

she ended up getting married and finding “menial jobs,” but never gave up thinking that she would like to do something to “make a difference and help people.”

Tracy remembers much of her own school experience in a negative way, and though she describes herself “on the higher end of the spectrum of students,” admits she “got really burned out in high school.” She didn’t read a book for five years after graduating high school. Though she admits being somewhat sheltered growing up, while in high school she still became very concerned about the impact of social and cultural differences on the lives of children and their success in school and was convinced that “something wasn’t right.” Eventually, she started seeking ways to educate herself and began thinking of ways she could teach differently than the way she was taught. Tracy had to work to put herself through college. She had two jobs the entire time she was in college, including the semester she was in student teaching.

Tracy is now certified to teach science in grades 4-8. She taught fifth and sixth grade science in her first student teaching placement and seventh and eighth grade science in her second placement. She did her TWS project during her first placement. “It made sense to get it out of the way.”

Tracy described her cooperating teacher as being very supportive. She teacher opened her plan book and files to Tracy and allowed her to teach any lesson she wanted. However, she also encouraged Tracy to choose her own approach and teach her own lessons. Before she started teaching, Tracy asked her cooperating teacher “where the students were” and “where they needed to be” and learned that the TAKS test was imminent. Tracy was very concerned that she help prepare them for that test. In the end, partly because she was afraid she might short change her students in some way, and partly because it seemed the safe approach, she decided to follow the order of the textbook. Throughout this experience, she relied upon her cooperating teacher to

tell her if what she was doing was okay, and if she was moving too fast or too slow for the students. Tracy came across as a responsible and caring teacher with painfully low self efficacy.

Tracy admitted that, rather than planning ahead, she began work on her TWS at the same time she began teaching the unit it was based on. By the time she began putting her TWS together, she had already completed the pre-assessment that she decided could be used as the benchmark for her TWS. She had also planned and taught most of the learning activities, but had not consciously aligned them with each other or any particular learning goal; she was just teaching the text book. She kept all her records and gathered needed information, but put off writing the paper (including those parts that describes tasks she should have accomplished before beginning the unit) until after the unit was complete.

When the interviewer asked her about those things, such as the contextual factors that should have influenced her planning for the unit, she assured him that “she was on the ball with the contextual factors” and learning goals:

I thought that I knew my unit goals, and I wrote them down, but then it turned out that I was not actually teaching that material. My goals didn't fit the material, and so...my pre-assessment wasn't the best that it could have been.

Later, she added,

I remember that those initial goals that I wrote down weren't very good, and when I was getting the time to go back and really look at the pre-assessment, I thought, “Whoa! My pre-assessment didn't match.” I didn't equally test every goal. There were some goals which turned out to be important that I didn't pre-assess, and that was a big “Whoa!”

Tracy went on to admit that the TWS taught her how to align instruction with goals and contextual factors, commenting, “I've never used a pre-assessment appropriately and

used it to change how I would change my teaching to meet those needs of the individual students.”

When asked about ways her cooperating teacher may have influenced her TWS, Tracy admitted that her cooperating teacher played no role and “didn’t look at it at all.” Tracy’s cooperating teacher told her that if she needed help, she would be happy to “check over it.” Though Tracy’s cooperating teacher offered to accommodate any request and to help her plan her TWS, she never actually looked at either Tracy’s TWS or her daily lesson plans. Later, Tracy confided that her cooperating teacher didn’t “really like the teacher work sample,” possibly because she didn’t understand it. She also commented that the only advice she received from her university supervisor was to “get it done or else!” and “Don’t let me hear from you again.”

Tracy did say that she and the other student teachers in her building often discussed the TWS, “...about where we were and what we were thinking about and planning.” She also mentioned that she felt overextended for the entire time she was in student teaching and that she wasn’t a very organized person.

Tracy insisted that doing the TWS was worthwhile, and that even though her first one was done incorrectly, it would have an influence on her teaching in the future. She was rather vague about how, but she did say that she believed the process, something she called “steps,” would help and that she would never have done them had she not been required. Tracy found great solace and security in knowing steps, steps she “could follow every time.” She admitted that without the TWS requirement, she would have “cut parts” and “wouldn’t have learned what I learned from doing it...how it’s important to do all those steps.” She then elaborated:

Like I said, I would not have realized if I hadn't had to write my goals down and go back and look at my pre assessment and post assessment, I don't understand how I would teach them and how I would be able to remain accountable for what I had taught the students.

Tracy believes the "hands on" nature of all aspects of student teaching lends real meaning to what is learned. It seemed to dawn upon her during the interview that the TWS and teaching share the same overall purpose. Tracy has decided that the TWS is a valuable resource, one that she can use to demonstrate accountability as a teacher.

When asked for a critique of her teacher preparation program, especially that part of it most closely related to the TWS, she had a number of very specific comments. Her main point was that her professors failed to make the purpose of the TWS clear, even though they did practice TWS projects in the two blocks of instruction leading to student teaching. She suggested that the full template for the TWS be used to frame all practice assignments and that students receive that template early in the professional coursework. She also thought all practice TWS projects should be group projects, as she felt she gained a great deal from comparing notes with the other student teachers in her building.

Tracy believes that her TWS and her presentation of it during a career fair will help her find a teaching job, as it allows potential employers to see how she teaches and that she can plan a good lesson. This, she thinks, gives her an advantage over someone with just a college transcript and a teaching certificate. Tracy ended up rather positive about the TWS, especially when compared to comments she makes regarding other aspects of her college career. She seemed most impressed by the fact that she will be able to apply it directly to the day to day work of teaching.

Implications for the College of Education

Multiple Placements in Student Teaching

Both the cooperating teachers and student teachers interviewed condemned dual 6 week student teaching placements. This presents a dilemma to the College of Education. Though many professors sympathize with the participants, the prevailing belief within the college is that multiple placements provide a more complete experience for teacher candidates, so this practice will likely continue.

Value of Student Teaching

No one interviewed in this study found student teaching without value, although some of the students described experiences that were less satisfying and productive than others. It appears that the quality of the student teaching experience is defined by a number of rather complex variables: the student's knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward teaching; the cooperating teacher's knowledge, skills, and attitudes about both student teaching and the teaching profession, and the context within which the student teaching occurs, including the students, the school, and the specific teaching assignment. Because of the innate richness of the student teaching experience, it seems that all student teachers benefit from the experience to some extent, but that they don't all benefit in the same ways or to the same extent.

Two variables that the College of Education will attempt to maximize are the purposeful selection of cooperating teachers and the systematic development of appropriate teacher dispositions in our students prior to student teaching. Additionally, it is clear that more careful attention to matching the teacher candidate with the student teaching assignment and the cooperating teacher would enhance the quality of the student teaching experience for all involved, including the students of the student teacher.

Cooperating Teachers' Lack of Awareness of TWS

The findings of this study were somewhat discouraging. In an attempt to encourage the support and assistance of the cooperating teachers involved, a complete description of the TWS project and its goals were published in the most recent Student Teaching Manual. This manual was provided to each cooperating teacher, and they were asked to use it as a guide when mentoring the student teacher in their charge, including their TWS. Additionally, a letter was sent to each cooperating teacher alerting them to this addition to the Student Teaching Manual and outlining the basics of the TWS. Apparently, neither of these was sufficient as the cooperating teachers interviewed for this study seemed uniformly unaware of anything beyond the basic nature of the TWS, most of which they had learned by eavesdropping in the teacher's lounge. None demonstrated the level of awareness necessary to adequately support the student teachers in their charge to prepare their TWS.

As a result, beginning in the term following data collection for this study, a number of changes were made in an attempt to improve communications between the College of Education and cooperating teachers and their understanding of the purpose and process of the TWS. First, cooperating teachers are now provided a half day workshop focusing on mentoring their student teachers, most of which is devoted to developing the TWS. As one of the student teachers observed in a Gestalt moment, the TWS really defines what we want students to learn about teaching. This is a central point of that workshop. Anecdotal feedback from current cooperating teachers suggests that this effort has raised both their level of awareness and their support for the TWS.

Student Teachers' Reaction to the TWS

Some of the student teachers clearly believed the TWS was a “waste of time,” was an unreasonable requirement given other more pressing demands of student teaching, or “lacked relevance in the real world of teaching.” Ironically, others did identify some value in doing the TWS, and one described it as the single most important learning experience in the teacher preparation program. Most interesting is the variety of ways the student teachers found to value the TWS. Some would have valued it more had it earned some tangible reward such as a grade. Some valued it because it allowed them a way to prove to themselves and others that they were doing good work. Others valued it because it reduced the act of teaching to a set of steps, not exactly what the College of Education had in mind. It is clear from the results that the College of Education needs to do more to fully integrate the philosophy driving the TWS (teaching decisions should be based on data) into the coursework leading up to student teaching and to provide our students additional opportunities to apply both the process represented by the TWS and the philosophy in authentic ways prior to student teaching. To that end, the faculty of the College of Education has integrated additional TWS like activities into the field experience component of professional education coursework. The improved quality of the TWSs produced by the first cohort of student teachers following the introduction of these changes suggests that this is working.

Beyond Student Teaching

Though the purpose of this study was not to promote a new way to evaluate practicing teachers, given its manifest logic and the growing acceptance of the concept as a valid and reliable way to measure the influence teaching has on student achievement, it seems logical that educators consider the possibility of using the TWS in combination with or in lieu of more

traditional, and often much less valid, methods of evaluating the effectiveness of classroom teachers.

References

- Denner, P. R., Salzman, S. A., & Harris, L. B. (2002). Teacher work sample assessment: An accountability method that moves beyond teacher testing to the impact of teacher performance on student learning. Paper presented at the (54th) Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, New York, NY.
- Devlin-Scherer, R., Daley, J., Burroughs, G., & McCartan, W. (2007). The value of the Teacher Work Sample for improving instruction and program. *Action in Teacher Education*, 29(1), 51-60.
- Eccles, J., & Wigfield, A. (1985). Teacher expectations and student motivation. In: J.B. Dusek (Ed.). *Teacher Expectancies* (pp 185-220). Hilldale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Fredman, T. (2002, February). The TWSM: An essential component in the assessment of teacher performance and student learning. Paper presented at the (54th) Annual Meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, New York, NY.
- Keese, N., & Brown, T. (2003). Student teacher input and Teacher Work Sample as part of a teacher education unit accountability system. Presented at the annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, (p. 18). Santa Fe, NM.
- Renaissance Project for Improving Teacher Quality. (2007). Renaissance teacher work samples. Author. Retrieved August 30, 2007 from <http://www.uni.edu/itq/RTWS/index.htm>

Schalock, M. D. (1998). Accountability, student learning, and the preparation and licensure of teachers: Oregon's teacher work sample methodology. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 12(3), 269-285.