Factors Affecting Teacher-Candidates' Practicum Evaluations

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Abstract

This report is an extension of a study that examined the final evaluations of 17 cohorts of teacher-candidates ($n=374$), who completed their 16-week extended-practicum through one Western Canadian university in one of the years from 1986 to 2002. Evaluation results based on nine instructional categories were analyzed according to four factors: (a) grade level taught; (b) school location; (c) year of the internship; and (d) gender of the intern.

Descriptive statistics calculated for each of these four factors revealed minor differences in the intern sub-groups' aggregates of final evaluation ratings. For grade level, interns who taught K-3 were rated slightly higher than those in the other grade levels in six of the nine instructional skills. The interns who taught grade 7-12 were rated lowest of the three groups in three of the teaching categories. With respect to urban/rural school location of the internship, interns from rural schools were evaluated slightly higher than their urban counterparts for six of the nine skills. For year of the practicum, calculations showed slightly better evaluations in three teaching skills for interns who completed the practicum after 1996, than for those who completed it during the 1986-1995 period. Female interns were rated slightly higher in eight of the nine teaching categories than were their male colleagues.

Possible explanations accounting for these minor differences are provided, and implications discussed for the program under study and for their "transferability" (Donmoyer, 1990) to pre-service teacher preparation programs.

Although the extended-practicum has been a highly valued component of pre-service teacher education programs (Meade, 1991; Zeichner, 1990), little research is available that documents the actual teaching performance of teacher-candidates during their school-based experiences. To help reduce this research gap, a recent study was conducted that summarized the aggregate descriptive statistics for the final evaluations of 15 cohorts ($n=374$) of teacher-interns, who completed their 16-week extended-practicum under the Canadian university. Each of these cohorts of 20 to 25 teacher-interns completed the practicum in one of 15 years during the period from 1986 to 2002 (Ralph & Noonan, 2004).

In these two reports, we have used the terms *teacher-intern*, *teacher-candidate*, *intern*, *novice teacher*, and *student-teacher* interchangeably.

The general findings of the earlier study revealed that these teacher-interns, as a group, (a) received their highest evaluation ratings for the instructional skills of planning and of personal/ professional attributes, (b) obtained their lowest evaluatory rankings for the areas of assessing pupil learning, teacher oral-questioning, and using a variety of instructional methodologies, and (c) did reasonably well in the categories of presentation/delivery, classroom management, and teacher responding (Ralph & Noonan, 2004). However, a subsequent research question that logically emerges from these initial findings, and that forms the purpose of the present report, is: *To what extent do the factors of grade-level taught, school location, year of internship, and gender of intern account for these differences?*

Background to these Studies

There is a body of professional knowledge and set of skills that are considered necessary, but not sufficient, for achieving teaching effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Good, 1990; Palmer, 1993). Moreover, research over the past four decades has consistently demonstrated that teachers who possess and apply this knowledge and these skills in their practice are more effective than those who do not (Anderson & Burns, 1989; Rosenshine & Stevens, 1986; Stronge, 2002).

At our College of Education, we have synthesized this research literature on effective teaching into a 200-page document called *The Internship Manual* (University of Saskatchewan, 2005) that classifies the professional knowledge base into nine essential teaching categories. This manual is used by all interns, their classroom cooperating teachers, and college supervisors during the extended-practicum to guide their respective teaching and supervisory activities throughout the four-month session, which appears in the fourth and final year of teacher-candidates' Bachelor of Education program. As is the case in most extended-practicum programs, a college supervisor works with cohorts of several intern/cooperating pairs in a particular jurisdiction. He/she conducts monthly full-day seminars examining selected instructional methods, strategies and skills with the cohort. The college supervisor also visits each pair every month in their respective schools/classrooms, and facilitates the classroom teacher's daily mentorship of the intern in the development of the latter's teaching skills.

The nine instructional categories in *The Internship Manual* (2005) serve as the basis of (a) the interns' teaching activities, (b) the supervisors' mentoring process, and (c) the evaluation criteria on which the interns are assessed (formatively, during regular supervisory conferences and at the formal mid-term evaluation; and summatively, at the collaboratively conducted final evaluation near the end of the practicum). A summary of the nine categories is as follows:

1. *Personal and Professional Attributes.* Teacher-interns are expected to demonstrate commitment to establishing and maintaining positive relationships and ethical conduct in all of their activities. There are 13 sub-skills that candidates are to internalize, and upon which they are evaluated, two of which are: to show initiative and leadership by

- involvement in school activities; and to exhibit affective attributes such as warmth, patience, tolerance, empathy, and respect.
2. *Lesson Planning.* Teacher-candidates are expected to compose two formal daily, written lesson plans, and to prepare and organize the necessary materials. Two of the 10 sub-skills are to include a motivational set for creating student interest; and to plan an effective sequence and time-frame.
 3. *Unit Planning.* Interns are to plan a minimum of two formal units of work incorporating eight specific criteria, two of which are: to define major concepts and key objectives; and to integrate related content with other subject areas.
 4. *Presenting.* They are to demonstrate 12 sub-skills in effectively “delivering” the planned teaching and learning activities by, for example, giving clear directions to pupils and providing pupils with guided practice and feedback/correctives, as needed.
 5. *Classroom Management.* Teacher-candidates should be able to incorporate the 13 strategies/skills found to be effective in creating the conditions in the classroom situation for teaching and learning to take place. Two classroom management expectations are: to gain attention of all pupils before beginning the lesson and at transition times; and to demonstrate awareness of inappropriate pupil behavior and implement effective interventions.
 6. *Questioning.* Interns are expected to internalize five key oral questioning skills that will enhance pupil learning, e.g., to demonstrate clear, concise questioning patterns and to distribute questions equitably among pupils.
 7. *Responding.* They are to demonstrate eight skills that encourage pupil learning and build pupil feelings of self-worth. Two examples of teacher responding behavior include the avoidance of repeating (“echoing” or “parroting”) pupil answers and the reinforcement of correct portions of pupil answers and effective probing of more information.
 8. *Employing a Variety of Instructional Methods.* Teacher-candidates are expected to develop and utilize a repertoire of teaching methodologies/strategies in order to meet particular instructional goals and/or learning needs of pupils. Using the 18 methods described in *The Internship Manual*, interns are to demonstrate five skills, two of which are: to enhance pupil acquisition of concepts, abstractions, and patterns of relationships; and to encourage pupils’ creative thought and to help them deal with experience of reality.
 9. *Assessment/Evaluation of Pupils.* Interns are expected to develop seven sub-skills in this area. For example, they are expected to use a variety of formative and summative assessment techniques; and to maintain records of formative and summative assessments for reporting purposes.

These nine instructional categories comprise the source of (a) the core objectives for the extended- practicum, (b) the basic knowledge- and skill-set that the interns develop throughout the term, and (c) the key criteria upon which the candidates’ teaching performance during the internship is judged. All of these materials, together with the related supervisory and evaluative procedures, are

explicit parts of the extended- practicum program, from the beginning through to its conclusion.

Contextual Supervision

The Contextual Supervision (CS) model (Ralph, 1993, 2004a) was used to guide the mentoring behavior of both the college supervisor and the cooperating teachers throughout the 15 years of the study. CS, a derivation of Hersey and Blanchard's original *Situational Leadership* approach, was selected because CS has been shown to embrace the strengths but exclude the weaknesses of the seven most prominent supervisory models related to the educational field. The CS model, as an adaptation of Situational Leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988; Ralph, 1991, 1992), shares Situational Leadership's advantages: it emphasizes adaptive leadership rather than "one best method"; it is intuitively appealing because it is relatively easy to understand (Caskey, 1988; Hersey, 1985); and it helps bridge the theory-practice gap by clarifying the conceptualization of supervision holistically, and by offering practical mentorship guidance to individuals in mentorship roles (Niehouse, 1988a, 1988b).

A second supervisory approach bearing some resemblance to CS is *Developmental Supervision* (Glickman, 1990). Both CS and Developmental Supervision emphasize self-development, and both follow an interactive process between mentor and protégé in determining the fit of supervisory style with development level. They differ in some areas, however. One difference is that Developmental Supervision appears to be more interventionist in that supervisors have the responsibility for diagnosing and prescribing what they decide supervisees need. Although CS agrees with Developmental Supervision in assuming that prescriptive structure may be required on occasion, CS is broader than Developmental Supervision in that it provides for supervisee-regulated decisions at the D4 level.

A second difference is that Developmental Supervision has only one middle development category, whereas CS has two (i.e., D2 and D3). CS thereby requires a more refined determination of protégés' developmental levels by mentors before selecting the appropriate combination of supervisory task and support behaviours in quadrants D2 and D3.

A third model, *Differentiated Supervision* (Glatthorn, 1990, 1997), also shares some commonalities with CS. For instance, both approaches are developmental and appear less prescriptive than Glickman's approach (1990). A main difference between CS and Differentiated Supervision, as was the case with Developmental Supervision, is CS's provision for four rather than three supervisory styles, a condition which provides for more accurate determination of supervisee skill-specific developmental level. This differentiation in turn facilitates subsequent synchronization of supervisory action within the two middle categories. Similar to Differentiated Supervision, CS retains the high task (directive) mode in S1 and S2 because certain protégés (at the D1 and D2 levels) may not yet have developed the expertise to self-select the type of mentoring they would like for a particular task and thus may require specific supervisory guidance from the mentor.

A fourth supervisory model that shares similarities and differences with CS is Acheson and Gall's (1997) clinical supervisory approach. These researchers

advocate the supervisor's application of the four basic leadership styles, as promoted by the Situational Leadership (and the CS) approaches, "... depending on the situation" (Acheson & Gall, 1997, p. 240). However, they tend to emphasize employing some form of the clinical supervision format (i.e., the planning, observing, and feedback cycles) with teachers, regardless of the teachers' developmental levels.

Yet, research on the supervision and evaluation of experienced teachers shows that the latter generally reject the traditional clinical process that involves recording data and giving oral feedback, in favour of a more collaborative and supportive relationship that stresses the pursuit of mutually established goals between peers (Fullan, 1991; Showers & Joyce, 1996; Showers, Joyce, & Bennett, 1987).

However, it is evident that Acheson and Gall (1997) do acknowledge this fact when they advocate that an effective supervisor (even though he/she may still employ some semblance of the clinical cycle with an experienced teacher) must consciously seek to: build interpersonal trust in the relationship; apply observational and communication skills delicately; encourage collegial decision-making between/among participants; and maintain a sensitivity and commitment to assisting colleagues to grow professionally.

A fifth supervisory approach with which CS may be compared and contrasted is Waite's (1995) *Situationally Contexted Supervision* model. Both this model and CS acknowledge the intricate web of complexities and unique influences characterizing each supervisory relationship: its participants and their experiences and personalities; the organization, its culture and its history; and the specific conditions under which the players interact in each supervisory environment. Where the two models differ, however, is in their response to these differential contexts.

Waite (1995) suggests that supervisors and supervisees need to conduct an ethnography of the entire supervisory scenario in which they are involved by examining all levels of the culture, i.e., the formal, informal, and technical aspects of their educational environment. They would strive for "... supervising the contexts not just the behaviors" (p.75). Waite does concede, however, that: "Such an undertaking is a tall order, requiring the investment of untold hours of work. . . ." (p. 24); and further, that, "... it may prove inaccessible to most teachers and students, and hence not inform local concerns" (p. 104). A key difference between CS and Situationally Contexted Supervision lies in the choice of focus of each model: the latter appears to invert the figure/ground frame by concentrating on the ground aspect (Waite, 1995, p. 99), while CS is oriented more toward the figure perspective — that is, the actual supervisory action in response to protégé level of development in practice.

Furthermore, CS shares some likeness and dissimilarities with a sixth supervisory model, Cognitive Coaching (Costa & Garmston, 1994). A key point of agreement between the CS and Cognitive Coaching approaches is that the goal of the participants in any supervisory process is to: "Learn which stage of transition each person is at and then organize the message to be congruent with that stage . . ." (Garmston, 1994, p. 66).

One area where the two approaches differ is that the Cognitive Coaching model does not provide a structured framework of four quadrants that specify

how mentors typically synchronize their leadership styles to match the task-specific developmental needs of their partners. On the other hand, the Cognitive Coaching model emphasizes specific techniques that mentors would employ as interventions to help protégés at any stage of growth, in order to improve and refine their cognitive processing and decision-making in their respective fields (Costa, 1995). Although the CS model would not discourage participants from employing these cognitive strategies (e.g., mental rehearsal, metacognition, restraint of impulsivity, and analysis/synthesis of experience), CS focuses less on developing generic cognitive skills for supervisees at *all* levels, and more on differentiating supervisor *task* and *relationship* responses at each level to meet supervisees' specific professional needs.

A seventh recognized supervisory approach comparable to CS is Sergiovanni and Starratt's (2002) *Supervision II*. Both models are congruent in at least three aspects: (a) they both avoid the false dichotomy of technical/rational skills vs. interpretive/individual decisions, by including both the traditional management role with the transformational leadership elements in their approaches; (b) they both assert that the *assessment* and the *assistance* aspects of supervision are inseparable activities that need not necessarily be conducted by different individuals; and (c) they both hold that supervision (i.e., the interactive process designed to assist both the supervisor and the supervisee to improve their respective professional practice) is contextually bound and situationally determined, thereby requiring supervisors to accommodate supervisee differences. The CS model distills much of the information presented in Sergiovanni and Starratt's (2002) approach into a manageable and practical framework that is immediately applicable by busy supervisors in their mentoring practice—whether they find themselves in university/school practica, in school district/school site staff-development, or in other staff-evaluation programs.

Summary of the Earlier Study

Using a statistical analysis of the final evaluations of the 374 teacher-interns (based on a numerical rating scale that used “3” for *Strong*, “2” for *Competent*, and “1” for *Concern* for each teacher-candidate's performance on the nine categories), the initial study yielded several results (Ralph & Noonan, 2004). These results are summarized in Table 1.

The key findings of the initial study were: (a) the interns' evaluations were strongest for the instructional categories of lesson planning, personal and professional attributes, and unit planning; (b) the interns were moderately competent in the skills of presenting and classroom management; and (c) they were rated lowest for the areas of responding, assessing pupil learning, oral-questioning, and incorporating a variety of instructional methodologies. In the light of these findings, we also indicated how our College (and other teacher educators pursuing similar interests) could initiate certain program changes to assist future teacher-candidates to improve their teaching skills during the practicum experience. Two examples of these initiatives were: improving the supervisory/mentorship process by implementing the *Contextual Supervision* model (Ralph, 1994, 1998, 2003, 2004a), and more carefully aligning pre-practicum coursework at the College with the expectations of the extended-practicum.

Table 1

Summary of Teacher-Interns’ Final Performance-Evaluations (N=374)

Category	M	SD
1. Lesson Planning	2.82	.375
2. Personal/Professional Attributes	2.80	.383
3. Unit Planning	2.64	.527
4. Presenting	2.47	.453
5. Classroom Management	2.44	.485
6. Responding	2.41	.460
7. Assessing/Evaluating Pupil Learning	2.41	.456
8. Questioning	2.38	.459
9. Using Variety of Methodologies	2.33	.421

Note. The scale of values for the performance evaluations, as shown in Table 1, included 3 for “Strong”, 2 for “Competent”, and 1 for “Concern”. “0” was not used.

Methodology for the Present Study

Participants

We originally examined the final evaluation forms of the 17 cohorts of teacher-interns, for whom one of the researchers had served as the college supervisor for their extended-practicum. This sample (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001) of teacher-candidates (n=374) was drawn from the population of all interns who completed their extended-practicum from 1986 to 2002 through our College of Education (approximately 6000 pre-service teachers). The sample consisted of one cohort of interns and their cooperating teachers per year over the 15-year period.

Each of these cohorts was representative of the annual number of approximately 400 teacher-interns, in terms of age, gender, university major/minor, grade and school placement, and urban/rural practicum location. I, as the college supervisor for all 15 cohorts, had no influence on the composition of any of the cohorts; and the distribution of these cohorts was assigned to me each year randomly by the field-experience office administrators.

Instrument

The instruments analyzed were the evaluation forms completed during the final three-way post-conference held with the intern, cooperating teacher, and college supervisor. On this form a collaborative decision was recorded regarding the then-current teaching performance of the intern (using the three-point scale) with respect to the nine teaching categories on which the internship was based. All of the data analysis was conducted well after the completion of all of the practicum sessions, and formal university ethics approval was granted prior to the analysis of the final evaluation reports.

Procedure

Using the SPSS 13.0 program (SPSS, 2004), we first calculated the means and standard deviations of the numerical equivalencies of the evaluation ratings of the nine teaching skills that were recorded on the 374 final evaluation forms. These results were reported and discussed in the earlier study (Ralph & Noonan, 2004).

For the present study, I attempted to determine the extent to which certain factors may have influenced the differences we found in the initial data. To attain this goal, I employed the SPSS 12.0 Program (SPSS, 2003) to re-calculate descriptive statistics for the aggregate evaluation results for the nine teaching skills, but this time I did so according to four independent variables. These variables were: (a) the grade level in which the intern taught (i.e., K-3, 4-6, and 7-12); (b) the year that the intern completed the extended-practicum (i.e., from 1986 to 2002); (c) the school's location (i.e., in an urban or rural setting); and (d) the gender of the intern.

I summarize the findings derived from these descriptive statistics for the four variables below.

Findings of the Present Study

Grade Level

Table 2 shows that although the nine sets of means and standard deviations for each of the three grade levels were different, there was no clear high or low pattern of ratings for any of the three levels.

Table 2

Evaluation Differences According to Interns' Grade Level Taught (N=374)

Category	M			SD		
	K-3	4-6	7-12	K-3	4-6	7-12
1. Professional Attributes	2.83	2.79	2.79	.3359	.3968	.4075
2. Lesson Planning	2.86	2.80	2.80	.3525	.4144	.3650
3. Unit Planning	2.63	2.47	2.66	.5411	.5285	.5169
4. Presenting	2.52	2.47	2.42	.4659	.4485	.4450
5. Classroom Management	2.45	2.51	2.39	.4818	.4819	.4851
6. Questioning	2.41	2.41	2.29	.4501	.4478	.4664
7. Responding	2.52	2.43	2.33	.4565	.4382	.4611
8. Methods	2.34	2.29	2.34	.4253	.3710	.4482
9. Evaluating	2.32	2.34	2.52	.4127	.4414	.4782

There were, however, two minor trends identified for the K-3 interns. This subgroup was rated slightly higher than the other two grade levels in six of the nine teaching skills, namely: personal/professional attributes, lesson planning, presenting, questioning, responding, and using a variety of methodologies.

The statistics for the interns at the grade 7-12 level showed that this subgroup was rated lowest of the three sub-groups for the three teaching categories

of presenting, classroom management, and responding. The grade 4 to 6 interns' ratings generally fell between those of the other two sub-groups.

A possible explanation for these trends may lie both with the nature of the methods coursework the teacher-interns completed prior to the practicum, and with the nature of the practicum mentorship they received from their classroom cooperating teachers. For instance, the K-3 interns learned (both on campus and in the school setting) that primary children typically have shorter attention spans, and that effective teachers must plan and prepare a variety of motivational activities and materials that are to be skillfully incorporated into a typical class period. Compared to the interns in the higher grades, the K-3 interns must constantly provide for the greater interactive needs of primary-level pupils. Furthermore, research has shown that a relatively higher degree of oral questioning and teacher responding is more often evident in primary classrooms than in classrooms of older students (McCown et al., 1999). In grade 7-12 classrooms the typical teaching/learning environment reflects, comparatively speaking, a more sustained dimension, where pupils have a longer attention span, where activities can be more independently enacted, and where the teacher does not have to incorporate as wide a variety of shorter, fast-paced activities (Duell, Lynch, Ellsworth, & Moore, 1992; Ornstein, 1990).

Another minor difference that seemed to favor the 7-12 interns was related to the evaluation of pupils. This sub-group of interns was rated somewhat higher than their peers in the lower grades, probably because more pupils at that level often demand to know how they will be assessed on their work, thereby forcing teachers to give increased attention to this instructional component.

These reasons may account for the slight differentiation in ratings among the three grade levels.

School Location

Separate descriptive statistics for the interns' evaluation rankings were calculated for the 374 teacher-candidates placed in rural and urban schools. In this and the earlier study, *urban* referred to schools located within either the province's two largest cities (populations above 200,000) or the 11 smaller cities (populations ranging from 5,000 to 40,000). *Rural*, on the other hand, referred to schools found in centers with populations of less than 5,000.

The data in Table 3 show that, overall, there were scarcely any differences in performance between rural and urban interns. However, the teacher-interns placed in rural schools had slightly higher evaluation ratings than did interns in urban schools for six of the nine teaching categories, namely: lesson planning, presenting, classroom management, responding, using varied methodologies, and evaluating pupils' achievement. In contrast, the interns located in urban schools scored higher for the categories of personal/professional attributes, unit planning, and questioning.

Table 3

Evaluation Differences According to Interns' School Location (N=374)

Category	Rural		Urban	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. Professional Attributes	2.80	.3838	2.81	.3833
2. Lesson Planning	2.84	.3555	2.79	.4124
3. Unit Planning	2.63	.5207	2.64	.5409
4. Presenting	2.47	.4480	2.45	.4646
5. Classroom Management	2.44	.4904	2.43	.4741
6. Questioning	2.35	.4467	2.37	.4853
7. Responding	2.42	.4510	2.41	.4595
8. Methods	2.35	.4192	2.28	.4230
9. Evaluating	2.41	.4360	2.40	.4560

A recent search of the ERIC database related to the subject of "student-teaching in rural schools" identified 20 possible sources, only four of which were somewhat pertinent to the present study. In one of these four studies Anglin and Piland (1995) showed that the student-teacher they studied progressed through a typical four-stage psycho-social pattern during the professionalization process (i.e., uncertainty, acceptance, autonomy, and affirmation). This developmental process seems to be common to all novice practitioners, regardless of their discipline or the location of their practicum placement (Hoz & Peretz, 1996; MacDonald, 1993; Moore, 1996).

In the second of the four ERIC studies, Borys et al. (1991) reported nine key benefits accruing to rural school divisions, to the faculty of education, and to practicum students, as a result of participating in one collaborative school-university partnership that jointly delivered an effective practicum program. Three of these benefits were: (a) student teachers received bursary support and assistance in finding housing in their placement; (b) faculty supervisors and classroom cooperating teachers shared the supervisory responsibility – and received the consequent recognition and support – for collaborating in helping students develop professionally; and (c) the school division capitalized on this collaboratively conducted practicum to recruit new teachers for its schools.

The third of the four studies (Hemmings & Boylan, 1992) surveyed 23 second-year student-teachers who did a three-week practicum in remote rural schools in Australia. The findings showed that participants were generally positive about both their teaching and living experiences, and that they would be willing to teach later in similar locations.

A fourth study in the ERIC search (Meiklejohn & Barrett, 1994), also conducted in Australia, indicated that novice teachers in rural communities: (a) recognized the importance of the school to the life of the community; (b) saw that rural schools vary as to the quantity of resources available to provide effective education; (c) understood the key role that teachers fill in rural settings; and (d) witnessed the close relationships that develop between rural teachers and their students.

Informal observations and anecdotal evidence reported by college- and in-school-supervisors of practicum programs in rural Canadian schools support

these findings. Nonetheless, systematic North American research focusing on this area has been rather sketchy and unfocused (Khattari, Riley, & Kane, 1997).

Possible reasons for the rural interns' slightly higher rankings have been reported in previous research conducted with 85 of these same participants (Ralph, 2002, 2003). Findings from these earlier studies identified several advantages of teaching and/or interning in rural schools compared to that done in urban settings. The key findings were:

1. Teachers become better acquainted with pupils and their families.
2. Teachers become more involved in community activities.
3. Teachers experience increased support from school staff and the community.
4. Teachers have more opportunity to engage in a wide range of activities (both in and out of the school).
5. Rural teaching offers more of a "countryside" or pastoral setting.
6. There are fewer student discipline problems.
7. Interns gain an opportunity to secure a rural teaching position.

It is likely that these benefits had a direct and positive impact on the rural interns' teaching performance, and consequently, this enhanced achievement was reflected in a corresponding higher ranking in the teaching evaluations they received.

Date of the Practicum

The calculation of separate descriptive statistics for each of the 15 cohorts who completed their internship from 1986 to 2002 revealed that each group had relatively similar results--except for moderate differences that were identified in three specific categories. These data are shown in Table 4.

For six of the nine skills (i.e., professional attributes, presenting, classroom management, questioning, responding, and employing varied methodologies) the interns' evaluation means for the 1996 to 2002 period were higher than their counterparts' ratings for the 1986 to 1995 time. The earlier interns, however, did better than the later group in both lesson and unit planning; while both groups were equivalent for evaluating pupils' performance.

Table 4

Evaluation Differences According to Interns' Date of Practicum (N=374)

Category	1986-1995		1996-2002	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. Professional Attributes	2.80	.3997	2.82	.3520
2. Lesson Planning	2.83	.3877	2.80	.3581
3. Unit Planning	2.68	.5148	2.57	.5477
4. Presenting	2.38	.4685	2.59	.3947
5. Classroom Management	2.39	.5362	2.52	.3816
6. Questioning	2.24	.4622	2.52	.3954
7. Responding	2.32	.4714	2.55	.3380
8. Methods	2.22	.4202	2.49	.3720
9. Evaluating	2.40	.4967	2.40	.4110

Two possible explanations for these differences relate to changes made to our college's pre-service program enacted in 1996. One change was the replacement of a direct-entry four year B. Ed. program (whereby students could enter our teacher education program directly after high school with a 65% average in their high school courses) by a sequential two-year B.Ed. program (whereby students could apply for admission to the same program after completing a minimum of 60 prior university credit units in approved courses). A second change incorporated in 1996 was the implementation of a new selection procedure for applicants, based on the candidate's performance on a combination of his/her current GPA (on the prior university coursework) and his/her score obtained from a combination of a pre-selection "entrance interview" and a timed essay (written immediately prior to the interview) that was related to the candidate's interest in teaching.

These two changes have raised the qualifications of students selected into our pre-service program, in that each year since 1996, there have been approximately 600 applicants, from which we select the top 300 candidates--based on the above combination score. For instance, the current coursework-average of selected applicants has risen from 65% to approximately 80%, with a correspondingly high interview/essay score. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that these program modifications directly influenced the subsequent achievement and performance levels of the post-1996 candidates during their internship, as shown by the increased ratings in the three key areas of the final evaluations of the post-1996 interns.

With respect to the decline in interns' skills in planning and their "non-growth" in evaluating pupil work, the signal is clear: we in the College need to increase our efforts in both the pre-practicum coursework and in the extended practicum, itself, to assist teacher candidates to improve in these areas.

Gender of Interns

Minor differences according to gender were identified in intern performance, as shown in Table 5. Descriptive statistics for the 374 evaluation results revealed slightly higher values favoring female interns in all of the teaching categories

Table 5

Evaluation Differences According to Interns' Gender

Category	Female		Male		F	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD		
1. Professional Attributes	2.81	.3665	2.78	.4284	.728	.394
2. Lesson Planning	2.86	.3490	2.72	.3752	9.792	.002
3. Unit Planning	2.70	.4865	2.46	.5266	15.090	.000
4. Presenting	2.49	.4585	2.39	.4530	3.527	.061
5. Classroom Management	2.44	.4812	2.44	.4967	.010	.922
6. Questioning	2.39	.4572	2.26	.4529	5.785	.017
7. Responding	2.43	.4604	2.36	.4558	1.522	.218
8. Methods	2.36	.4308	2.22	.3761	7.745	.006
9. Evaluating	2.43	.4501	2.34	.4560	1.838	.176

except classroom management. A calculation of ANOVAs for these eight skills, four of them (i.e., lesson planning, unit planning, questioning, and methods) were statistically significant at the .05 level. However, researchers caution that just because two related measures show “statistical significance” does not automatically indicate that this correlation has practical or educational significance in a specific situation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). By contrast, there may be a number of other contextual factors that exert influence upon a case; and even though these factors may be prominent, they may not be easily measured in the statistical sense.

Many researchers who have investigated the issue of gender differences in academic achievement believe: (a) that such differences-- if they even exist at all-- are only modest and variable (Banks & Thompson, 1995; Lefrancois, 1999); (b) that such differences are socially and culturally determined through home, family, peers, and school experiences--rather than through genetic or hormonal determinations (Slavin, 2003; Woolfolk, 2003); and (c) that these differences are more the result of individuals' and groups' unconscious assumptions, unexamined beliefs, and gender stereotypes (Sadker, Sadker, & Klein, 1991; Streitmatter, 1994).

Other scholars (Browne & Reynolds, 2004; Gurrian, 2001; Reynolds, 2004) allow that there are observable gender trends in *aggregate* populations, and patterns of behavior tendencies within *large* populations, such as:

1. Males tend to prefer working alone, and females tend to prefer working in groups.
2. Males tend to value peer reaction over that of adults, and females tend to strive to please adults.
3. Females tend to apply memorized formulae to solve problems, and males tend to employ relevant experience to solve them.
4. Female students tend to over-achieve, and male students tend to under-achieve in general scholastic work.

In another gender-related issue, there has been some research that reported that females generally find the practicum experience more stressful than do males (D'Rozario & Wong, 1996; Morton, Vesco, Williams, & Awender, 1997); but that all practicum participants report a reduction in stress by virtue of experiencing the daily routines of teaching during the practicum (Murray-Harvey et al., 2000; Ralph, 2004b; Smith & Sanche, 1993).

All of these factors may not be generalizable to specific individuals, but they may well account for the slight differences found across the entire population of the interns involved in the present study.

Implications for the Extended- Practicum

The findings from both the earlier study (Ralph & Noonan, 2004) and this present report have shown that the teacher-interns in the college's program do demonstrate a general competence in their teaching skills; but that--individually and corporately-- they exhibit a range of performance ratings. As a group, they are ranked higher for the categories of planning and demonstrating professionalism than they are for the actual “face-to-face” instructional

interactions. In order to help future interns strengthen these weaker areas, teacher-educators in other institutions who are seeking the same goal may consider--as we did--implementing specific program modifications, such as: (a) incorporating Contextual Supervision, whereby all supervisory personnel are taught to adjust specifically their mentorship styles to meet the skill-specific, individual developmental-levels of the protégés with whom they are working (Ralph, 1994, 1996, 2002); and (b) aligning more closely the content of the pre-practicum methods courses with that of the extended-practicum.

With respect to the content of the methods courses and the practicum, the course instructors and the college supervisors at our University could use the findings from this 15-year study to inform the instructional and supervisory practice of their pre-service program. This information would help to re-focus and/or reconfigure the teacher-candidates' learning activities, so as both to enhance the skill areas needing improvement and to maintain those that are strong.

For instance, the data related to the *grade level* of the internship suggest that for interns at the grade 7-12 level, the program leaders will need to emphasize, more than they have in the past, teacher-candidates' mastery of the foundational skills of presenting, classroom management, and responding. That is not to say that exemplary teaching can be reduced to the mere performance of a set of basic instructional skills, but rather that novice teachers who do internalize the essential competencies of professional practice are, in general, more effective than those who do not (Borich, 2003).

With regard to urban or rural *location* of the internship, the findings of this study indicate that doing the practicum in rural schools is not at all detrimental to the interns' instructional performance, compared to that of their urban counterparts; in fact, it appears to have some benefits. These results confirm findings from other research on practicum locations reported above. This information could be disseminated by practicum administrators to help attract pre-service teachers (who may have been prejudiced against doing their practica outside of cities) to complete their internships in non-urban areas (Ralph, 2002, 2003, 2004b).

On the other hand, these data may present a challenge to all participants in urban internships to attend to strengthening the alignment and delivery of all aspects of the practicum experience: the program objectives, the pre-coursework, the placement procedures, the practicum monthly seminars, the supervisory process, and the assessment procedures. For example, some veteran college supervisors, who had worked with cohorts both in urban and rural locales, suggested that the city cooperating teachers were more impatient with the program procedures than their rural counterparts were. That is, the latter seemed somehow more eager and conscientious to comply with the practicum regulations and expectations; and by contrast, because of the city cooperating teachers' familiarity with the program, they tended to show more irritation or exasperation with the practicum procedures.

Implications are clear for the findings related to differences in performance of the teacher candidates due to *year* they did their internship. Improvement was noted in interns' evaluation ratings in the year (and the years thereafter) the college implemented positive program modifications (i.e., requiring applicants to

have had at least 60 credit units of previous coursework, and incorporating a compulsory interview and entrance essay). The results that our College experienced as a consequence of these changes could be taken into consideration by other teacher-education institutions interested in informing their policies and practices related to improving the extended-practicum component of their respective preparation programs.

With respect to the minor *gender* differences that were observed as slightly favoring the female interns' teaching performance, at least two perspectives emerge. One position, based on some of the gender research in education, would be to consider any so-called genetic or hormonal difference in learner aptitude or ability as a purely random phenomenon, because of the view that there are no significant, innate gender differences in scholastic achievement and abilities (Feingold, 1992; Friedman, 1989; Sadker, Sadker, & Steindam, 1989). Proponents of this position assert that if any gender differences are identified, such differences would be due solely to specific socialization and learning factors affecting an individual's upbringing at home, at school, in the community, and within one's cultural environment (LeBlanc Kohl & Witty, 1996; Papalia & Wendkos Olds, 1989).

The other perspective is that there are indeed biologically centered, gender differences in learning abilities and achievement (Andrews & Basom, 1990; Helgesen, 1990; McGrath, 1992); and that women are rated better than men in a number of instructional tasks and skills (Gupton & Appelt-Slick, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989). Nevertheless, one common area of agreement that is shared by most educators and researchers on both sides of the debate is that every member of the educational enterprise (be they teacher-candidates, practicing teachers, administrators, or teacher-educators) is ethically and morally obligated to resist gender bias of any sort in all of their activities. That point was aptly made by Streitmatter (1994) and Iseke-Barnes and Nathani Wane (2000) who advise all educators to analyze their unconscious assumptions that often support gender-biased stereotypes and practices, and to recognize that each individual's professional development is determined by a complex variety of environmental and biological factors.

If the goal of the practicum is to help teacher-candidates advance their professional knowledge and skills, then the present study re-emphasizes that we in teacher education programs should help them improve those skills that have been shown to be more difficult. By doing so, we will help them to facilitate the learning of their own students—which after all is the ultimate aim of effective teaching.

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