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Student Teaching Practice in Two Elementary Teacher Preparation Programs

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Abstract: This study examines student teaching of elementary teacher preparation programs in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the United States of America (USA). Two programs comparable in program design, course requirements and goals were selected for exploration. The key aspects that were studied about student teaching include its unit ratio in a program, features of placements, written work by student teachers and evaluation. Findings indicate that these programs share the same basic elements related to student teaching but differences exist in student teaching sequence, focus on candidates' practice to assume teaching responsibilities, participation in evaluation and level of peer interaction. The PRC program places an emphasis on teamwork of candidates and makes them active evaluators in a three-step sequence including mock mini lessons. The USA candidates are required to gain considerably more field and teaching experience in duration and number of lessons to teach cross multiple subjects. They also reflect on their practices regularly in addition to fulfilling other credential requirements beyond the program. Educational implications are discussed regarding the characteristics of the programs in an international context.

Introduction

The ultimate goal of teacher preparation is for teacher candidates to conduct quality instruction in the classroom. While it is crucial for teacher candidates to develop a solid understanding of educational theories and other knowledge about teaching in the college classroom, they must be capable of applying what they have learned to demonstrate competence as a practitioner in an authentic instructional setting. As a result, field based student teaching is an important component that allows teacher candidates to make a transition from a learner on university campus to an instructional designer and deliverer on a school site. The quality of student teaching is essential in a teacher preparation program (Cobb, 1999).

The importance of student teaching has caught the attention of a large number of educators, and the term of "student teaching" or "a strong clinical practice component" (Cobb, 1999, p. 5) has been widely used in international comparison of teacher preparation programs as well as research. In February 2011, an ERIC document search using "student teaching," as key words generated 13,588 results although the number of publications was much smaller when "elementary school" was added to the key words.

The aspects of these studies range from student teaching of a certain subject (Cotugna & Vickery, 2005; McCaughtry, Barnard, Martin, Shen, & Kulinna, 2006) to university-school collaboration (Lapan & Minner, 1997; O'Donnell & Gallegos, 2006). For publications (Cobb, 1999; Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1995; Liu & Qi, 2006) that compare teacher preparation programs between the PRC and the USA, student teaching is only introduced or discussed generally as one of the program components. Therefore, a study that focuses on student teaching is needed to further examine different aspects of student teaching practice between these two countries. The results will not only reveal new information about student teaching in an international context but also create an opportunity for teacher educators to review and reflect on their own current practice of student teaching for possible improvement. What follows is an overview of studies about student teaching in the PRC and the USA.

Literature Review

In the PRC, the main topics explored in student teaching extend from improving the existing system to its impact on teacher candidates' professional growth. Specifically, each of the aspects below is covered in preparing candidates for teaching: creation of a new model in response to educational reform (Ni, 2005; Shang, Liu, & Zhang, 2007), alignment of pedagogy courses with student teaching (Chen, 2006; Lü, 2006; Wei, Wang & Wu, 2005), impact of student teaching on the professional growth of teacher candidates (Wei, 2008; Zhang, 2007), and other issues related to student teaching such as time allocation and arrangement (Cao, 2008; Chen, 2006; Deng, 2006; Wu, 2007; Yang, 2007; Yu, 2005).

To improve the current student teaching model, Shang et al (2007) emphasize the importance of recruiting experienced classroom teachers to serve as university supervisors or advisors. Student teachers can benefit more from their experience when they are supervised and guided by those who possess a thorough understanding of education and pupils' learning as well as experience in applying theories to practice. High quality supervisors can be instrumental in developing and strengthening strong collaboration and partnership between schools and universities to improve student teaching. Similarly, Ni (2005) highlights the crucial role played by university supervisors to ensure quality of student teaching. He also argues that teacher candidates should be exposed to teaching in a real context as early as possible, or starting from the second semester of the first year to be exact, and maintain the experience until program completion. In other words, access to and participation in teaching practice should not be required and arranged only at the end of a program.

In aligning pedagogy courses with student teaching for a teacher preparation program, Wei et al (2005) identify several areas to improve the teaching of these courses so that candidates can get better prepared for student teaching through the experience. The authors conclude that the following should be strengthened: (1) make methods course more subject specific in response to the characteristics of target content, (2) help candidates develop competence in better supporting pupils' learning and understanding by connecting target concepts to their life experience, and (3) create an opportunity for candidates to increase ability in getting pupils actively engaged through hands on and experiments when appropriate.

Similarly, Chen (2006) points out a need to improve the quality of pedagogy courses by allowing candidates more access to application and helping them develop competence in facilitating pupils' learning during instruction. Therefore, field experience should be an essential component in course requirements for candidates to develop teaching ability on a school site. Moreover, Lü (2006) specifies two aspects for student teachers to get sufficiently trained to work effectively with pupils in the classroom by taking methods courses. First, extensive exposure to classroom teaching practice through systematic observation should be useful either on school site or via media. Secondly, teaching of mini lessons is an appropriate means for candidates to make a smooth transition to student teaching in a real context.

The impact of student teaching on the growth of teacher candidates has been another topic of study. According to Wei (2008), much time or effort is devoted to lesson preparation but little attention is given to lesson analysis and reflection. Lack of self reflection and evaluation of teaching can significantly affect quality of student teaching when candidates miss an opportunity to learn from others and understand what works or does not work in teaching. The study conducted by Zhang (2007) is an examination of 20 teacher candidates. Data are a collection of classroom observations, interviews and student teachers' reflection journals. Findings indicate that student teachers (1) learned what it meant to develop a positive rapport with pupils in the school context, (2) developed a good understanding about the spectrum of tasks, from getting to know learners to keeping the classroom tidy, for a teacher whose job is much more complex than responsibilities for students' academic learning, (3) re-evaluated who they were as a teacher candidate, (4) identified a need to get better prepared for student teaching during pre-student teaching stage of the program, and (5) acknowledged the importance of receiving guidance and support from supervisors or advisors during the student teaching process.

Furthermore, other scholars and educators have identified additional aspects to strengthen student teaching (Cao, 2008; Chen, 2006; Deng, 2006; Liu & Qi, 2006; Wu, 2007; Yang, 2007; Zhu & Zhang, 2010) from preparation for student teaching, time arrangement to supervision or feedback given to student teachers. One issue is about preparation that candidates receive before they enter student teaching (Deng, 2006; Yang, 2007). Student teachers are often not well prepared for teaching in the classroom due to limited understanding of curriculum and lack of experience in applying appropriate teaching strategies. An emphasis is often placed on candidates' development of content knowledge but more attention is needed to support their growth in selecting and utilizing appropriate methods to make teaching more effective (Liu & Qi, 2006). Consequently, many student teachers demonstrate competence in content knowledge but are challenged to address pupils' needs to provide instruction that is developmentally appropriate (Cao, 2008) and create a positive environment to motivate them to learn (Yang, 2007). Also, in time arrangement of student teaching, it features a rather short, intense period of four to five weeks (Chen, 2006; Deng, 2006). Another issue is a need for a balance between time spent on observation and actual teaching in the classroom (Wu, 2007). In addition, although student teachers receive feedback from their university supervisor when they teach mock mini lessons on college campus, the presence and impact of university supervisors is rather limited when student teachers are placed on a school site. Therefore, consistent support or feedback from university supervisors is an aspect identified for improvement (Wu, 2007; Zhu & Zhang, 2010).

In response to the main issues in student teaching, including those discussed above, a national guide on how to improve student teaching in teacher preparation programs of universities with a primary focus on preparing teachers was published (Ministry of Education, 2007) in the PRC. It states, "to improve the quality of student teaching and foster instructional competence of teachers in training, teacher education programs should arrange for their candidates to gain teaching experience at elementary or middle schools for a minimum of one semester" (p. 2). In addition, field experience should be strengthened to get teacher candidates well prepared for student teaching because it is essential for them to apply what they have learned about teaching in an actual school context. This guide signals policy change in the requirements of student teaching for teacher preparation programs although time is needed for implementation to unfold gradually.

For studies published in English and available in the USA, evaluation of student teaching quality and variables that affect student teachers' professional growth are highlighted (Clift & Brady, 2005; McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009). After a review of research studies on student teaching and field experience, McIntyre et al (1996) categorize three trends. One trend relates to a movement of streamlining all requirements to reach program goals, which addresses the need identified in a previous study (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). The second trend deals with a continuing application of qualitative methods to research and evaluation of field experiences. Data for a qualitative study can reveal attitudes and behaviors of student teachers, which creates an opportunity for teacher educators to develop a better understanding of their trainees. The third trend is an increased integration of field experience and use of technology as supplement to the traditional teaching. Videotaped mini lessons serve as a platform for candidates to interact with teachers to practice application of various teaching methods or techniques. Moreover, the authors point out a lack of knowledge on what types of program produce more effective teachers and what methods are more effective than others. In other words, practice should be validated in training teachers and it is desirable to conduct field experience in a systematic manner.

About a decade later, another review of research studies on student teaching (Clift & Brady, 2005) recognizes the impact of various factors such as individual, instructional and contextual variables on the development of teacher candidates. The authors also urge researchers to investigate developing practice of student teachers using a more complex conceptualization of interactive nature in response to many factors and players involved in the process.

Student teaching is considered to be one of the most difficult experiences to understand (Valencia, et al., 2009). An ecological approach is adopted for examination of student teaching from the perspective of all key players. Findings from the above study suggest lost opportunities for student teachers to learn due to sparse feedback on teaching, few links to methods courses and limited opportunities to develop identities as teachers.

From an international or comparative perspective, several studies or reports have been published to compare the curriculum and practice of teacher preparation between the PRC and the USA (Cobb, 1999; Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1995; Liu & Qi, 2006). In the comparative study by Darling-Hammond et al (1995), a chapter is devoted to the introduction of overall teacher training and professional development in the PRC. In this 32-page section, space allocated to description of student teaching for teacher preparation programs (four years to complete) at normal universities is rather minimal. The

requirement of student teaching "consists of classroom teaching and fulfilling duty as a home-room teacher (p. 61)," and the total time of student teaching is eight weeks. Those candidates who do not pass student teaching will be disqualified from receiving a diploma. The description of three-year teacher preparation programs housed at normal colleges provides slightly more detail in how student teaching time is arranged: at least half of student teaching time (eight weeks in total) must be scheduled in the last semester of the program.

To examine more details of teacher preparation practice between the PRC and the USA, another study (Liu & Qi, 2006) provides a direct comparison of two elementary teacher preparation programs in the two countries with an examination of the main program components. Aspects for comparison are program admission, curriculum design, course outlines, pedagogy and content knowledge development in addition to other requirements such as time allowed for program completion. Findings in the above study reveal major differences in field experience and student teaching in allocation of efforts and time between the two programs. However, no details are available on how student teaching is actually arranged in different aspects such as placements, assignments for student teachers, and evaluation criteria.

A study that focuses on examining specific aspects about how student teaching is arranged between two elementary teacher preparation programs in the PRC and the USA is timely to fill a gap. The results from such a study will enrich the existing literature on student teaching from a comparative perspective of teacher preparation practice. Therefore, the focus of this study is to examine student teaching practice of two elementary teacher programs each in the PRC and the USA. The key components under exploration are: program ratio of student teaching, features of student teaching placement, primary written work completed by student teachers and evaluation or course grading. The selection of the above aspects for analysis is based on the aforementioned literature review. Data collection for this study extends from policy and guidelines, program documents, course syllabi to student teacher sample work, in addition to communication with supervisors. The research question is: what are the similarities and differences in student teaching between the two elementary teacher preparation programs of the PRC and the USA?

Introduction of the Two Programs

Two elementary or multiple subject teacher programs in the PRC and the USA were selected for this study. These two programs are comparable in goals, requirements, type of credential and degree to be granted upon program completion, background of candidates and type of university to house the programs to provide a valid platform for examination. Each of the above aspects will be further discussed in detail as follows. The total number of credit units to fulfill these programs is similar at 150 vs. 136. Courses range from one to four units with most courses of two or three units. Both universities operate on a semester system although some summer courses are available to the USA candidates.

The PRC teacher preparation program is housed in the College of Education and Science at a public normal university in the east of PRC, founded 65 years ago. The main purpose of the normal university is to train teachers of different subjects such as math, Chinese language arts, science and social studies at all levels from early childhood

to adult education. The university admits students from across the country and almost all of the undergraduate students are new high school graduates upon entering the program. Each fall semester of an academic year, 50 to 60 candidates are enrolled in the multiple subject or elementary teacher preparation program. Candidates are expected to complete the program in four years, but the program can range from three to six years depending on their selection of the accelerated or regular program. Upon program completion, candidates receive a bachelor's degree and teaching credential that qualifies them for teaching at any elementary school in the PRC. Since the national standards for the teaching profession are infused into the credential program, candidates are not required to take any additional examinations or fulfill any requirements beyond this program.

Similarly, the university in the USA also has a history of over half a century and the program is housed in the College of Education. The public university is located on the west coast, which primarily admits students from the home state. Most of the candidates enter the teacher preparation program either as a first year or transferred students from community colleges. Program admission takes place twice a year, each in spring and fall semester and candidates are from the state, other states or foreign countries. Unlike post-baccalaureate credential programs in the USA, which require a bachelor's degree for admission, candidates of the selected program will receive a BA degree upon program completion. They also earn a teaching credential after they fulfill all state requirements of a teacher candidate, which are above and beyond the program. All credential applicants must pass three examinations each in basic skills, content knowledge and reading instruction competence. They must also successfully complete each of the four teacher performance assessment (TPA) tasks. Credential is officially issued by the state Commission of Teacher Credentialing after candidates fulfill all program and state requirements satisfactorily. Unlike their counterparts, the USA program graduates are fully licensed to teach at elementary schools of the home state and may need to complete additional requirements to be eligible for a teaching position in other states. The program can be tailored to meet candidates' needs and lasts between four to six years. The curriculum of the four year accelerated program is selected to make it most comparable to the four-year program in the PRC.

Data Summary

Due to constraints such as program length, unit allocation often reveals priorities or emphasis given in a program. Since student teaching is an essential component of these teacher preparation programs, it is important to examine its unit allocation in relation to other requirements. In addition, three other elements are further analyzed: how student teachers are placed, what types of written assignments student teachers are expected to produce to showcase their performance, and how evaluation is conducted in these programs. Below is a focused analysis of these four aspects about the two selected programs: program ratio or allocation, features related to placements, sample written work from student teachers and evaluation.

Allocation of Student Teaching and Related Field Experience

Table 1 presents a summary of student teaching and related field experience requirements for both programs. The total number of units is close between the two: the PRC program requires a minimum credit unit of 150 and the USA candidates must accumulate at least 136 units to be eligible for graduation. However, the ratio of student teaching as a component within the two programs is rather different. Specifically, the PRC program allocates 3% of effort or 5 units for its candidates to gain student teaching experience. The USA program, in contrast, commits about 12% or 16 units to student teaching, which is approximately four times as much as the former percentagewise. To better understand unity or continuity in a program, requirements on field experience are also presented in Table 1 since they are directly associated with student teaching as preparation for better completing the culminating task. The types of field experiences are service learning, observations/practice required in methods courses, and mock teaching of mini lessons.

	The PRC Program	**The USA Program**
Student teaching	5/150 units=3%	16/136 units=12%
Service learning/observation	25 hours in a week (3rd year)	125 hours min. (complete by graduation)
Field experience in methods	N/A	50 hours
Mock mini lessons	plan/teach 3 mini lessons	N/A

Table 1: Program Allocation to Student Teaching and Related Field Experience

Service learning or observation is required by both programs for candidates to have access to teaching practice and provide assistance as needed to their host elementary school teachers. The USA program stipulates that candidates fulfill 125 hours throughout the program, approximately five times as many as required in the other program. Although the arrangement for the experience is coordinated through an office on university campus, candidates complete the required hours on an individual basis with verification from their host classroom teacher. In comparison, the PRC program devotes one full week for their candidates to have intensive field experience at partner schools in the third year of the program. The activities include observation of at least five lessons (or 3.5 hours minimum), attendance of one homeroom meeting, one staff meeting on lesson planning and other professional development activities in addition to attending other activities at the school. At the end of the week, candidates are required to write a summary in no less than 3,000 words to reflect on the experience. The activity is group based, in which student teachers must interact with each other throughout the week. For each group of candidates assigned to a school, a university advisor is available to provide facilitation and guidance.

Field experience associated with a methods course is only applicable to the USA program. Ten hours are required when candidates take each of the methods courses in different subjects such as language arts, science, and social science. Candidates are expected to complete course assignments to develop teaching ability and competence related to instruction of a designated subject. On the other hand, the PRC program makes mock teaching of mini lessons an unequivocal step or stage in student teaching, which is not specified in the counterpart's program. This part is designed to help candidates develop basic teaching skills, interest in teaching and professionalism in a simulated

environment purposely set up on university campus. For every 20 candidates, a university advisor is assigned to guide them to fulfill this task. Peer observation and evaluation is mandatory for candidates to learn from each other through observation, analysis, discussion and reflection.

Features of Student Teaching Placement

Student teaching placements in the two programs will be explored in each of the following aspects: length and duration, placement settings, teaching responsibilities and subjects to teach. A highlight of student teaching placements is shown in Table 2. As a reflection of the number of credit units assigned to student teaching, length, duration and arrangement of student teaching are also very different between these two programs.

The candidates of the PRC program are scheduled to student teach in the first semester of their senior year. The total time for student teaching is nine consecutive weeks but actual time for student teachers to teach in the elementary classroom is six weeks. The student teaching experience is comprised of three parts: observation, mock teaching of mini lesson and teaching on school site. The first two parts serve as preparation for candidates to teach in a real context and assume other responsibilities in the classroom. As for the week of observation, student teachers are to attend two staff meetings that have a focus on lesson planning. The experience allows candidates to get familiar with curriculum and instruction in a school context. Then, back on campus at the university, they spend two weeks on mock teaching of mini lessons to practice how to design lesson plans and deliver lessons in a simulated setting with their peers and supervisor as pretended "pupils" and evaluators. Two basic skills to develop for lesson delivery are handwriting on the board and using Chinese language to communicate appropriately in teaching. When the final stage arrives, student teachers return to the host school for face to face interaction with pupils to improve their teaching abilities, which lasts six weeks. Despite the multiple subject nature of the program, these candidates are not placed to gain student teaching experience in all of the subjects. Often times, student teachers are only assigned to teach lessons in one or two subjects such as math and/or Chinese language arts.

	The PRC Program	The USA Program
Length & Duration	-Spring of 4th year -9 weeks: 6 on-site teaching	Last academic year: half day for 32 weeks OR last semester: full day for 16 weeks
Placement setting(s)	-One setting: any in 1-6 -Placed in a peer team	-Two settings: K-2 and 3-6 -Individually or with a peer partner
Teaching responsibilities	-12 lessons (6 new) -2 weeks of full day instruction	-Over 100 lessons -3 weeks of full day instruction (min.)
Subjects to teach	1 or 2 subjects	All subjects

Table 2: Features of Student Teaching Placement

In comparison, the USA program requires that candidates spend half a day for a total of 32 weeks or two semesters in student teaching while taking methods and other courses back on campus during the rest of the day. For those candidates who have fulfilled all other requirements, they may complete student teaching full day for a total of 16 weeks or one semester. During the time, their attendance is the same as their cooperating teacher. In the week before student teachers report to an assigned school, they attend orientations Wednesday through Friday to get prepared for student teaching at the university. The orientations are designed to provide training on professionalism, classroom management and lesson planning. During the semester of student teaching, candidates also attend seminars scheduled by their supervisor weekly or biweekly at one hour per week to discuss how to complete assignments and address issues that they may encounter in the assignment.

To fulfill teaching responsibilities, the PRC candidates must teach at least 12 lessons within six weeks when they are in elementary school classrooms. Six of these lesson plans must be originally designed and the same lesson(s) can be taught to pupils in a different classroom(s) of the same grade. The small number of lesson plans is a partial explanation why student teachers can only gain experience in teaching one or two subjects, mostly Chinese language arts and math, the main subjects taught at school. Additionally, the student teachers are encouraged to use the last two weeks for full day instruction approved by their cooperating teacher. As for the USA group, student teachers are gradually phased in until they take over all responsibilities from their cooperating teacher. They assume full day instruction at least three weeks, one week for the first placement and two for the second placement, often in a self contained classroom. Typically, they develop four to five lesson plans each day during full day instruction, which means the number of lesson plans they design and teach can range between 60 and 75. Also, the subjects covered in the lesson plans virtually include any subjects taught at elementary schools from language arts, math, science, social studies to health, visual arts, and physical education. Student teachers should gain experience in planning and teaching over 100 lesson plans by the end of student teaching.

In addition to teaching assignments, student teachers in both programs must also assume other responsibilities. Candidates in the PRC group are required to learn to play the role of a homeroom teacher. Their duties may include supervision during pupils' independent work in the morning and at noon, meeting with individual students during non-instructional time, and organizing homeroom meetings regularly to address any

issues related to pupils' growth. They also lead experiments and extracurricular activities to work with pupils in an informal learning context. Student teachers are required to plan and host at least one homeroom meeting during student teaching. For the USA group, candidates are often guided to develop report cards and assess pupils' learning or progress in the classroom. They also communicate with parents as needed under the supervision or guidance of their cooperating teacher. They are expected to attend staff meetings and professional development activities (whether by grade level or school wide) with their cooperating teacher.

Written Work by Student Teachers

Written documentation can be used as a vehicle for student teachers to record and demonstrate their performance and competence during student teaching. Both programs expect written work for their student teachers to meet standards for the teaching profession. Table 3 is a comparison of the primary written assignments produced by student teachers of the programs.

The written assignments for student teachers in the PRC group appear not as extensive or demanding when compared to those for their USA counterparts. They are encouraged to write journals but no entry number, frequency or topics are specified except the summative self evaluation. In mock teaching of mini lessons, they must design three lesson plans, teach the lessons to their peers and university supervisor, and reflect on their experience. For final evaluation, each student teacher submits one sample lesson plan with application and reflection, summative self reflection, and a plan with application and reflection for a class meeting as a homeroom teacher. The homeroom meeting does not involve actual learning of subject matter but can be closely related to pupils' learning and growth in an array of aspects. Topics may include how to improve learning efficiency, how to work collaboratively, or how to deal with challenges. Their collection of written work serves as equivalency to a mini professional portfolio.

	The PRC Program	**The USA Program**
Reflection journals	-Frequency not specified -Summative self reflection	On weekly basis
Lesson plans & other	-3 lesson plans-mini teaching -1 plan for a homeroom meeting	Unit of study: two subjects 5 lesson plans (one lesson to videotape)
Professional Portfolio	-1 sample lesson plan -1 plan for homeroom meeting -Summative self reflection	-Artifacts on 6 teaching standards -Individualized Induction Plan

Table 3: Primary Written Work by Student Teachers

The USA student teachers are to complete several major written assignments throughout student teaching in addition to meeting all other requirements of the state Commission on Teacher Credentialing. First, they document their professional growth by using reflection journals. They write journals on a regular or weekly basis to record their experiences, analyze what works or does not work, and discuss what they would do next. Topics for journal entries are centered on the six state Standards for the Teaching

Profession and can be assigned by a supervisor in alignment with seminars. These standards will be further discussed in the next section on evaluation. Secondly, all student teachers design a unit of study to develop competence in integrating different subjects to better support pupils' learning of subject matter and English Language Development. The unit includes a minimum of five lesson plans and all lessons must be taught during a student teaching placement. In addition, the unit of study is used as a base for student teachers to complete Teacher Performance Assessment task 3 (with a focus on assessment) and 4 (with a focus on classroom instruction). These tasks are independent assessments designed and required by the state Commission on Teacher Credentialing, and candidates are graded by independent assessors who should neither know nor supervise them. Finally, student teachers also compile a professional portfolio to showcase or highlight their work. They can use the portfolio to document their professional growth related to the six Standards for the Teaching Profession. One component in the portfolio is the Individualized Induction Plan (IIP), in which a student teacher identifies three areas of strengths and three areas for improvement. The IIP serves as a transition from student teaching to teaching as a novice classroom teacher, which allows candidates to continue to grow based on what they have accomplished and need to improve at the end of student teaching.

Evaluation of Student Teaching and Grading

For both groups, evaluation of student teaching touches upon at least three aspects: evaluators, evaluation criteria, and methods of conducting evaluation or grading. When details are examined, significant differences exist across all areas between these two programs. Table 4 is a summary of all members who participate in evaluation of student teaching. While primary groups of evaluators can be found in both programs, differences exist in the role that each of the groups, especially student teachers, plays in evaluation.

	The PRC Program	The USA Program
	-Peer group evaluation=10%*	-Individualized Induction Plan
University supervisor	-Observation=10% -Mock mini lessons=20% -Summative evaluation=40%	-2 formative assessments -2 summative assessments -Final course grading: credit/no credit
Cooperating teacher	-Summative evaluation=20%	-1 formative evaluation -1 summative evaluation
Student teaching Office/Lead team	-Assign course grade (letter) -Select outstanding student teachers	N/A

- Percentage worth for final course grade

Table 4: Evaluation of Student Teaching

The PRC group lists student teachers, university supervisors and cooperating teachers as well as the student teaching lead team (basically comprised of university supervisors) as members who participate in evaluation. All members adhere to the student teaching evaluation guide that contains five major evaluation criteria or standards: teaching attitude, understanding of subject matter, application of teaching methodology, basic teaching skills and instructional outcomes. The five criteria are further broken down into 19 evaluative sub-items.

An individual PRC student teacher contributes to evaluation through writing reflection journals and more importantly a reflective summary at the end of student teaching although their work is not given a specified percentage in final grade. In the meantime, all student teachers also serve as an evaluator of their peers who are assigned to the same group. In this capacity, feedback from the peer group weighs 10% of a student teacher's final grade.

For the PRC university supervisors, they walk candidates through the process from guiding them to understand curriculum and instruction at a host school to observing them in teaching action with follow up feedback for improvement. They also play a significant role in supporting candidates' preparation for mock mini lessons with a clear goal to support their understanding of curriculum and instructional planning. Obviously, the evaluation from a supervisor counts the most; it takes over two thirds of the evaluation chart or 70% in final course grade.

Cooperating teachers are the third group of PRC evaluators who guide and advise student teachers to assume the responsibilities of a homeroom teacher in addition to classroom instruction. They write an evaluation summary for each student teacher by filling out an evaluation form at the end of the placement. Their assessment is worth 20% of the final grade.

Therefore, the evaluators whose feedback affects final course grade are student teachers in peer group evaluators (on their team members' performance only), cooperating teachers and university supervisors. The student teaching lead team, often formed by university supervisors, is responsible for reviewing performance of student teachers based on information from all evaluators. After deliberation and verification,

the team assigns a letter grade to each student teacher and also makes a selection for outstanding student teachers.

For the USA group, evaluators or self evaluators are comprised of three groups: student teachers, university supervisors and cooperating teachers. The student teaching evaluation criteria are the six state Standards for the Teaching Profession: engaging and supporting all in learning, creating and maintaining an effective environment, making subject matter comprehensible, planning instruction and designing learning experiences, assessing learning and developing as a professional educator. Each of the evaluation criteria covers a cluster of 5-7 sub-items, which adds up to a total of 35, much more detailed than those adopted in the PRC program.

Although student teachers write self reflection journals and complete other assignments to demonstrate their professional growth, which is used as basic information for assessment, they are not actively or directly involved in final course grading. Formative and summative evaluations are completed by a university supervisor and cooperating teacher independently and after communication and discussion between the two, a student teacher signs to acknowledge that the evaluation is discussed in conference with the supervisor and/or cooperating teacher.

A university supervisor plays a key role in conducting evaluations and is solely responsible for assigning the final course grade. Every supervisor is to provide guidance to help each of their student teachers fulfill all requirements and complete four evaluations in the middle and end of each placement; two are formative and the rest are summative. The evaluations are based on weekly classroom observations, information from cooperating teachers and review of all other work completed by a student teacher.

The third group of evaluators for the USA program is cooperating teachers. They provide informal written feedback and complete two evaluations, formative and summative, each in the middle and the end of a student teaching placement. Unlike a university supervisor, a cooperating teacher does not participate in course grading although his/her evaluations can be crucial information for consideration when a supervisor makes a decision on final course grade.

Discussion

Student teaching is apparently an essential element in preparing teachers for both programs and is a culminating task to for student teachers to complete the program. While the programs share the same main elements related to student teaching such as allocation within program, placements, written assignments and evaluation as explored in the analysis of this study, substantial differences exist in how each of them is specifically arranged in a respective program. Discussion will be unfolded following the order of the aspects listed above.

Student Teaching and Related Field Experience

In unit allocation, the USA program dedicates many more units to student teaching. Its candidates are also required to fulfill significantly more hours to observe in the classroom as featured in service learning and field experience. The finding confirms that more attention and efforts from the USA program are allocated to field experience and student teaching reflected in program unit ratio and other related requirements than their PRC counterpart (Liu & Qi, 2006).

In addition, field experience hours are infused in the methodology courses of the USA program to allow candidates to make a connection between theory and practice. This practice creates an opportunity for candidates to gain experience in applying what they have studied at the university to support pupils' learning. While the PRC program has high expectations for its candidates to develop content knowledge (Liu & Qi, 2006), an alignment of field experience with development of applying appropriate subject specific methods is an identified need (Chen, 2006; Lü, 2006; Wei et al., 2005) to improve quality of methods courses. It is argued that methodology should be studied in response to the characteristic of a target subject (Wei et al., 2005), and candidates should have more access to teaching practice to gain experience and develop ability in supporting pupils' learning during instruction (Chen, 2006). These aspects are being substantially attended in the USA program as the finding in this study indicates.

A suggestion to better prepare candidates for teaching is inclusion of mock mini lessons (Lü, 2006), which is incorporated in student teaching of the PRC program but is not listed as a separate or independent requirement by the USA program. The task required in the PRC program is completed in a simulated setting to help candidates gain competence and confidence in delivering a lesson in front of a live audience. Many student teachers feel extremely nervous when they first start to teach in the classroom, so such a preparation can be an icebreaker to alleviate unnecessary stress and tension. Clear articulation, appropriate use of Chinese language to deliver content at pupils' level and well organized presentation of key points on the board can serve to facilitate learning. However, if candidates have access to a real classroom to teach part of mini lessons, they would learn more about teaching through actual interaction with target pupils, which is indispensable to ensure instruction quality. This can be accomplished through university-school partnership because teacher candidates are unable to complete the credential program at the university without intensive teaching experience gained on a school site. Therefore, strengthened collaboration between school and university (Lapan & Minner, 1997; Ni, 2005; O'Donnell & Gallegos, 2006; Shang et al., 2007) is proposed as a means to enhance teacher preparation.

Student Teaching Placement

Clearly, the USA program commits significantly more in length and duration to student teaching. The PRC program candidates spend about one third as much time working independently or collaboratively with their cooperating teachers to practice teaching in a real context. However, compared to the practice in the mid 1990s (Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1995), the PRC program under study has actually increased student teaching time by 12.5%, changing from eight weeks to nine. Although length of time itself could be a factor that affects quality of teacher education, effective and efficient use

of time is most crucial to student teachers' success (Zhu & Zhang, 2010), which is worth exploring in future studies.

One major difference in student teaching between the two programs is how student teaching is staged. The PRC program has three independent steps that are sequenced starting from an initial warm up on school site to mock teaching of mini lesson on university campus and a final return to school site to gradually prepare students to teach lessons independently in the classroom. Preparation includes observation and lesson planning meetings on the school site followed by mock teaching of mini lessons in a simulated classroom environment. It is apparent that the PRC program is making an effort to address the issue of candidates' not being adequately prepared for teaching (Deng, 2006; Yang, 2007). Nevertheless, the preparation minimizes direct interaction between student teachers and pupils in the first three weeks assigned to student teaching. The experience gained in mock mini lessons can help candidates develop handwriting on the board and articulation in lesson delivery in addition to an increase of familiarity with curriculum. Without knowing how pupils would respond to their teaching, student teachers miss an opportunity to identify and respond to issues during teaching and learning. Therefore, student teachers are challenged to provide developmentally appropriate instruction (Cao, 2008) and to create a supportive environment to improve pupils' motivation (Yang, 2007).

On the other hand, the initial warm up or preparation in the PRC program is carried out in a team context for student teachers to work with classroom teachers, university supervisors and more importantly their peers. Meetings on lesson planning serve to help them better understand how to design lessons to make teaching more effective. Feedback and input from the above three groups can be valuable for them to understand what works well, what is overlooked and what is to improve, which functions as a platform for a student teacher to develop as a professional educator.

In comparison, the USA program sends their student teachers to an assigned classroom on the first day of semester for student teaching. Candidates are expected to get ready for student teaching when they fulfill service learning hours and complete field experience hours assigned to the methods courses. They develop lesson plans in all subjects taught at a school under the supervision of their cooperating teacher and university supervisor. Mock mini lessons are not typically arranged for them to obtain feedback and input from their peers and supervisor.

For lessons to plan and teach, candidates of the USA group no doubt gain significantly more teaching experience in the total number of lessons as well as in the number of subjects covered in teaching. They also spend more time on full day instruction that should better prepare them for independence as a classroom teacher. Although research lacks in examination of relationship between different programs such as time allocation and effectiveness of student teaching (McIntyre et al., 1996), well-planned exposure and experience in the classroom have been identified as important elements (Chen, 2006; Deng, 2006; Wu, 2007) to better prepare teacher candidates.

Sample Work to Showcase Experience

Throughout student teaching, candidates are expected to produce written work for submission, which is also a personal collection or documentation of their professional growth. The products can be sorted into three categories although information in one category can be included in another. For example, samples from reflection journals can be selected for inclusion in professional portfolio to present a student teacher's growth.

Both programs value the use of reflection journals in supporting student teachers to develop professionally. However, the PRC program does not offer any specific directions except the final self-reflection to conclude student teaching. Student teachers could benefit more from reflecting on teaching practice if they were closely monitored and guided throughout the experience to develop a clear understanding of what they have learned (Wei et al, 2005; Zhang, 2007). Student teachers need not only to understand how learning occurs but also how their teaching is related to learning (Sexton, 2011). In the meantime, the issue of finding a balance between teaching and reflection should be addressed for the purpose of improving the quality of student teaching (Wang, 2008). Furthermore, information from reflection can unmask student teachers' attitude and behaviors related to teaching and can be useful in evaluating the quality of student teaching (McIntyre et al, 1996). These programs can make use of the information from their student teachers' reflection to better understand their learning process for program enhancement.

Language cross curriculum occurs when a teacher integrates the teaching of language arts and content areas such as mathematics and science (Cox, 2008; Matthews & Rainer, 2001). The unit of study that the USA student teachers must design and teach allows them to explore how to integrate different subjects in their instruction to provide a more meaningful environment for teaching and learning. They also videotape one of the lessons that they teach in the unit to document their teaching performance in the classroom although no specific instruction is provided on how to use it for student teaching or program evaluation, except a supplementary file for TPA task 4 required by the state.

For the PRC program, their candidates are expected to develop lesson plans for mock lesson delivery before they teach pupils in the classroom. As discussed in the section above, teaching mini lessons in a simulated environment does not enable student teachers to understand actual teacher-pupil interaction in a real, instructional context. Additionally, other than classroom teaching, the training of student teachers to fulfill the duties of a homeroom teacher is emphasized in the PRC program. Candidates develop a plan of engaging pupils in a homeroom meeting and host it during student teaching, which is concluded with self-reflection. The purpose is to prepare student teachers to communicate with pupils in a non-academic context to nurture youngsters' growth in different aspects. The impact of culture and community is highlighted in the Socialinguistic Learning Theory (Dixon-Kraus, 1996; Vogotsky, 1978, 1986) to acknowledge the importance of activating and referring to children's prior or background knowledge to enhance learning. This non-academic activity can be well connected to subjects such as science and social studies to enhance learning environment and allow students to see the purpose of learning.

A collection of sample work from student teaching is a component for both programs. The USA program guides candidates to organize their work and other information in alignment with the state Standards for the Teaching Profession. Since the

same criteria are applicable to classroom teachers holding a credential, candidates are prepared to build on their student teaching experience when they become a classroom teacher. Another important component in the portfolio is the Individualized Induction Plan that serves as a transition between student teaching and independent teaching. In it, student teachers identify three areas of strengths and three areas to improve as a summary of their experience and performance in consultation with a university supervisor and cooperating teacher. Information from the portfolio can be useful for researchers to investigate the developing practice of student teachers (Clift & Brady, 2005). In comparison, the volume of the portfolio expected from the PRC student teachers is much smaller. Some of the counterpart's practice such as alignment of portfolio with standards as well as connection between student teaching and teaching after certification should be worthwhile for those who direct, coordinate or are associated with the PRC programs to consider.

Student Teaching Evaluation

The two programs cover similar main evaluation criteria to assess student teachers from "making subject matter comprehensible" to "developing as a professional educator." However, the USA program offers many more evaluative sub-items under each of the main criteria. Since the credential program is developed with the state Standards for the Teaching Profession as its foundation, an alignment is made between student teaching and program goals (McIntyre et al., 1996). Moreover, unlike a typical university course where an instructor is a sole evaluator and grader, feedback from others can significantly affect the final course grade for a student teacher. University supervisors are the most critical players, which explains why high standards should be maintained in recruiting supervisors (Ni, 2005; Shang et. al., 2007).

Next to supervisors are cooperating teachers who work closely with student teachers when the latter learn to assume different types of teaching and other responsibilities on school site. Both programs require evaluation from cooperating teachers although their input affects the final grade differently. The evaluation of the PRC cooperating teachers counts for 20% of the final grade. In other words, the points assigned by a cooperating teacher can affect the grade letter of a student teacher but are not sufficient enough to fail a student teacher alone. For the USA program, although feedback from cooperating teachers does not have a designated percentage in the final grade, their evaluation could be a decisive factor for a student teacher to receive course credit or not. Which of the above evaluation methods is more effective in preparing student teachers? Research is needed to answer the question.

Finally, the participation of student teachers in evaluation has a different effect on the final grade between the two programs. Although both programs require student teachers to evaluate their experience mostly through reflection, no specific percentage in final grade is assigned to their self evaluation. However, the PRC student teachers are responsible for evaluating their peers through a team effort and their team evaluation is worth 10% in final grade. Despite the fact that peer evaluation makes a small fraction of the overall assessment of student teaching, this practice allows student teachers to play a more active role, moving from a pure learner to an evaluator. Team effort built in peer evaluation could be a useful variable that has an impact on the development of teacher candidates (Clift & Brady, 2005). To provide evaluation, student teachers must have

observed their peers, analyzed their performance, and learned what to do or not to do in their own teaching. Lesson analysis, reflection and peer interaction/collaboration can have a significant impact on professional development (Wei, 2008). Such practice can be a valuable variable added to the dynamics of student teaching or a more complex conceptualization of interactive nature (Clift & Brady, 2005). To ensure that student teachers benefit from the activity, carefully organized coordination and clearly described guidelines are essential to make it more effective. Through evaluating peers, student teachers can develop critical thinking ability and even leadership in working with their colleagues in the future.

Limitations

Due to manuscript length, this study only explores what student teaching entails from the perspective of design and structure of these two programs. It would enrich discussion if voices or evaluation of all participating parties such as student teachers, supervisors and cooperating teachers were heard. Information about how the three groups of members interact to maximize the learning of student teaching would be especially useful, which can lead to better understanding of the complex and dynamic process (Clift & Brady, 2005). Input and reflection from all participants especially student teachers are primary sources to better understand how student teaching is perceived and assessed (Ni, 2005; Shang et al, 2007; Valencia et al, 2009). Additionally, any data about teaching effectiveness of former program candidates would be valuable to examine the quality of teacher preparation programs. Information on direct evidence of program effectiveness can be presented and discussed with the reviewed literature as background.

Conclusion

This comparative study reveals the different characteristics of student teaching design and structure in program ratio, placements, sample written work and evaluation between the two programs. While both programs share the same requirements for teacher candidates to practice teaching on a school site, actual implementation of student teaching is rather different. The main differences as discussed in the above session present throughout the process from placements, length, arrangement, assignments to responsibilities of participants and evaluation. It is hoped that the results would be useful for teacher educators to re-evaluate and reflect on their own practices through studying how student teaching is approached in a different program and how some differences could affect the quality of their teacher preparation. Examination of student teaching in an international context is timely and necessary to explore teacher preparation for program improvement and advancement.

Although the primary goal of student teaching is for teacher candidates to perform in the classroom as independent individuals, its success rather depends on a collective effort. University supervisors, cooperating teachers and others including peer student teachers all contribute to the professional growth of teacher candidates. Whether it is to strengthen student teaching preparation or enhance quality of student teaching in better

alignment with program goals, it is worthwhile to continue to investigate more effective ways to work collaboratively in support of student teachers in the future. When student teachers are responsible for playing a more active role such as an evaluator instead of a mere receiver of feedback, they enrich their experience by viewing their professional development from a different perspective that is critical and evaluative.

To make the transition from student teaching to teaching as smooth as possible, student teachers need to have a clear understanding of how the training they have received in a teacher preparation program is connected to the standards for the teaching profession. Such awareness appears important to maintain continuity between teacher preparation and elementary school teaching as practiced in the USA program. When candidates assess where they stand as a teacher throughout and at the end of student teaching, they can be better prepared to meet challenges and address issues when teaching in their own classroom as a credentialed teacher.

Student teaching is a stage that enables candidates to apply their learning about teaching in an actual instructional context, demonstrate competence in assuming a variety of teaching responsibilities and develop professional identities as teachers. The learning process serves as a transition for a candidate to gain independence in becoming a credentialed teacher, and the quality of student teaching should have a major impact on their future as they pursue the teaching profession. Among many topics related to teacher preparation, research on different aspects and issues of student teaching from a comparative perspective in an international context allows teacher educators to view from a different standpoint, which is apparently a way to enrich the understanding of teacher preparation.

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