

Perceptions of Teacher Educators and Teacher Candidates on the Use of Teacher Work Samples Experience Study

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Introduction

This element of the research initiative was implemented to investigate teacher education faculty and teacher candidate perceptions of the authenticity of the Teacher Work Sample methodology (TWS). Surveys were completed by participants at eight (8) teacher education institutions in the state of Oregon. Researchers were interested in discovering how teacher candidates' perceptions changed over the course of completing one, two, or three work samples, how faculty and teacher candidates perceptions compared, how perceptions varied from one institution to another, and what components of TWS participants believed were more or less valuable in the development of teacher effectiveness.

In addition to data about the inception and development of TWS (Evolution Study) and the impact of TWS methodology on teacher candidates and K-12 student learning (Effect Study), the Experience Study team collected data to identify possible elements of the work sample process or product that might need reconsideration or modification in order to increase student teachers' intrinsic motivation to conduct and complete work samples. Recognizing that the value added to the efficacy of a teacher education program by TWS methodology does not lie solely in the perceptions of teacher candidates or faculty, researchers nonetheless recognize the importance of an optimal balance between felt needs of participants and the purposes and objectives of the teacher educators. This paper presents preliminary findings from the initial data set of a year-long study of the Work Sample Experience.

Methods

Setting

Faculty and teacher candidates from eight (8) teacher education institutions in the Portland, Oregon metropolitan region participated in the Experience Study. Two (2) of the institutions offer teacher education programs at the graduate level only, four (4) have teacher education programs at both the graduate and undergraduate level, and two (2) offer teacher education programs at the undergraduate level only.

TWS is an element of teacher education that is required by the State of Oregon. Teacher candidates must successfully complete two (2) work samples during their student teaching

experiences in order for programs to recommend them for initial licensure. Therefore, all institutions have imbedded this requirement in their curriculum. In addition, a few of the institutions include a small ‘practice’ work sample experience early on in their program. This provides an additional opportunity for teacher candidates to gain the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to successfully complete the work samples that are a required part of successful student teaching.

Participants

242 teacher candidates participated in the Experience Study. 142 participants were enrolled in graduate teacher education programs and 100 participants were enrolled in undergraduate teacher education programs. At the time of the data collection, the teacher candidates participating in this study had completed at least one (1) work sample. 33 teacher education program faculty participated in the Experience Study. Data was not available regarding the number of faculty who teach in undergraduate or graduate teacher education programs.

Data Collection Instrument

Data about the experiences of faculty and students with TWS was collected using a survey instrument. The survey consisted of 12 prompts using a Likert scale, 1 –strongly disagree to 5 –strongly agree. Three (3) of the prompts related to the participants’ experiences regarding the TWS Methodology. Nine (9) of the prompts addressed specific Elements of the TWS. Table 1 identifies each prompt within the appropriate category.

Table 1. Content of Quantitative Prompts on Survey

TWS Elements Prompts	TWS Methodology Prompts
4. Community Context	12. Effective Tool During Student Teaching
5. Lesson Planning	13. Effective Tool For Teaching in the Future
6. Pre- and Post-Assessment	14. Authentic Way to See the ‘Big Picture’ of Unit Design
7. Formative Assessment	
8. Analyzing Student Learning Gains	
9. Written Reflections After Teaching	
10. Reporting Progress to Parents	
11. Final Reflections on TWS	

The survey also included two (2) open-ended questions. The first question focused on the ways in which the learning to teach process benefited by using TWS methodology. The second question asked respondents to recommend changes to the TWS methodology to make it more beneficial. In a content analysis of the responses to these two questions, six categories were identified: Planning, Teaching, Assessing, Reflecting, ‘Big Picture’, and Other.

The faculty survey elicited information about the various roles they fill in the teacher education program at their particular institution, i.e., teach courses that include instruction about TWS, and involvement in assessing teacher candidate work samples. The student survey included such demographic data as gender, age, and enrollment in undergraduate or graduate teacher education programs. Copies of the faculty and student surveys are included in the Appendices of this paper.

Findings of the Experience Study

This section summarizes teacher candidate responses on the survey, faculty responses on the survey, and makes some comparisons of faculty and teacher candidate perceptions of their work sample experiences. The chart below indicates the mean scores and standard deviations from the TWS Elements survey prompts and the TWS Methodology survey prompts for both faculty and teacher candidates.

	TWS Elements		TWS Methodology	
Teacher Candidates	3.66	SD .65	3.70	SD .86
Faculty	4.20	SD .65	3.98	SD .89

Teacher Candidates

For teacher candidates there was a statistically significant moderate correlation between TWS Elements and TWS Methodology (.627, $p < .01$). Means for the individual TWS Elements were the highest for the categories of Lesson Planning and Assessment. Teacher candidates perceived substantial benefits in having multiple opportunities to engage in planning daily lessons, designing pre-assessments, post-assessments, and considering formative assessment data as they modified and adapted their teaching. The following excerpts from the question #15 are representative of the benefits perceived by the teacher candidates regarding the TWS Elements of Lesson Planning and Assessment:

Lesson Planning	Assessment
“The worksample process helped me guide my daily teaching strategies. It prepared me for instruction and helped stay on task.”	“It . . . involves matching instructions with assessment and then assessment with the standards.”
“Made me aware of many things that affected teaching that I wouldn’t have been aware of otherwise”	“By assessing students and writing reflections of daily lessons I was able to . . . modify or differentiate lessons to meet the needs of students.”

The lowest means occurred for the individual TWS Elements of Community Context and Reporting Progress to Parents. The perceptions that these elements are less beneficial than many of the other aspects of the TWS may indicate that teacher education programs need to be more explicit about the value of communicating with parents and making community-school connections in the classroom curriculum. While lesson planning and assessment are instructional skills that teacher candidates are enacting on a daily basis while teaching the work sample, Community Context and Reporting Progress to Parents involve knowledge and dispositions that they may have not had sufficient opportunities to develop during their field experiences. None of the participants focused on these two Elements when asked about the benefits of the TWS on Question #15.

Teacher candidates' perceptions of the TWS indicated no statistically significant differences in a number of categories. There were no differences between private universities and public universities. There were no differences between undergraduate and graduate teacher education programs despite substantial variations in program structure and content. There were no apparent differences between male and female students. The number of work samples that teacher candidates had completed made no significant differences in their perceptions of the benefits of the TWS methodology.

Faculty

Teacher education faculty in the Work Sample Experience survey rated all aspects of the work sample as helpful, rating the TWS Elements slightly higher than TWS Methodology. In particular, faculty rated designing lesson plans and formative assessment as the most helpful of all the TWS Elements (means of 4.5 and 4.1, respectively). The following excerpts from the Question #15 qualitative data are representative of the benefits perceived by the faculty regarding the TWS Elements of Lesson Planning and Assessment:

Lesson Planning	Assessment
<p>“It helps them . . . think globally and know[ing] why they are teaching what they are teaching, . . . and going beyond ‘I teach this because it is mandated’.”</p> <p>“It <u>should</u> provide evidence of students’ knowledge and skills to teach for inclusive diversity. Sometimes it does but many times it does not!”</p>	<p>“It is tangible to the candidate. They can review, see their work and note student growth. They see the results of their work.”</p> <p>“[It] allows students to get beyond themselves as new teachers and focus on <u>student learning!</u>”</p>

Faculty perceived the work sample to be an authentic means for teacher candidates to gain experience in lesson planning and formative assessment. The opportunity to plan a series of connected lessons and teaching them over a period of time was seen as a beneficial part of the learning to teach process for teacher candidates. The opportunity for teacher candidates to engage in a day-to-day teaching scenario offers an added benefit of gathering formative assessment data for the purposes of modifying their lessons and differentiating instruction.

A content analysis of the faculty responses to Question #15, however, identified two TWS Elements different from the quantitative data analysis. The most common responses fell into the categories of Planning and Teaching. There was also a high incidence of open-ended responses that were categorized as ‘Big Picture’. In some instances, the response identified each of the major components of the TWS: “Planning, organizing, implementation, assessing, reflecting, modifying lessons guided by best practice.” Other responses used language that represented the overall process of the TWS: “It forces student teachers to experience the entire process”; “It gives them the whole picture”.

Comparison of Faculty and Teacher Candidate Data

Faculty perceptions regarding the TWS Elements were significantly higher than the perceptions of the teacher candidates, as indicated in the chart earlier in the Findings section ($t(316) = 5.38$, $p < .001$). While this is a significant difference in perceptions regarding the TWS Elements as a set of skills, both faculty and teacher candidates agreed that two particular Elements were critical constructs for effective teachers to develop. Both teacher candidates and faculty felt that the Elements of lesson planning (Item #5) and assessment (Items #6 and #7) best aided them in developing effective instructional practices.

Faculty differed substantially from teacher candidates in their perceptions of the benefits of the TWS Elements of Community Context and Reporting Progress to Parents. Faculty felt that these Elements were more important to incorporate into classroom instructional practices than teacher candidates.

The qualitative data revealed that, in general, faculty perceived the TWS more beneficial than the teacher candidates. 78% of faculty and teacher candidate responses could be categorized as Teaching; for the remainder of the categories, the percentage of faculty responses were consistently higher than teacher candidate responses. Teacher candidates, much more often than faculty, focused on single TWS Elements, i.e., they only mentioned the value of Planning; or their response focused on Teaching and Assessing.

Faculty placed a much higher value on the 'Big Picture' aspect of the TWS methodology than teacher candidates (60% and 16%, respectively). At one level, this data is not surprising; faculty have had much more experience with TWS methodology and use work sample data for assessment purposes as well as consider its value as a teaching resource.

Since this is a preliminary study, almost all of the teacher candidates were responding after having taught one work sample; in a small number of cases, they had developed a 'practice' work sample and completed one work sample. The first work sample is completed in the early stages of their student teaching experience, where teacher candidates are also dealing with the 'extra-instructional' aspects of daily classroom life, i.e., classroom management issues, non-classroom duties, pull-out programs, and parent volunteers, to name a few. They are so focused on the little things that are impacting them moment by moment, it's very difficult for them to step back and consider the 'big picture' of what's happening in their classrooms. The preliminary results being reported in this paper serve as important baseline data; we are anticipating some useful comparative results once data has been collected across the life of the teacher preparation program participating in this study.

At another level, it does raise questions about the role that the TWS methodology plays in the teacher education curriculum. Are there ways that programs can modify their curriculum and/or field experiences that will help teacher candidates develop dispositions regarding the 'big picture' of TWS methodology while, at the same time, they are also developing the knowledge base and skills of planning, teaching, assessing, and reflecting? The data from Question #16 offer some insights from faculty and teacher candidates regarding changes to the TWS and the perceived benefits from such changes.

Inviting Changes to the Teacher Work Sample Methodology

The second open-ended question, #16, invited respondents to propose changes to the TWS methodology. Faculty and teacher candidates were in agreement that the TWS methodology could be improved, faculty to a much larger degree than teacher candidates. The data results revealed a number of structural and logistical issues that are distinct from the conceptual and content-related aspects of work samples. The following excerpts from the Question #16 qualitative data are representative of logistical issues perceived by participants regarding the TWS:

Data Source	Logistics	Modifying the Process
Faculty	“We seem to be forcing them to concentrate more on the wording than the teaching process, and they put a lot of time into duplicating pages of information from the lesson plans . . .”	“The work sample process often becomes one of jumping through hoops for students. Is it pretty enough? Is their grammar correct?”
Teacher Candidates	“The handbook that was supposed to guide us and provide requirements was scarce, poorly organized, with bad examples.”	“The work sample does not allow for flexibility. There were some days I had to completely change my lesson, and this has no place in the work sample other than reflections.”

The preliminary findings of this study indicate that logistical issues may be having an adverse impact on the opportunities for teacher candidates to learn from the TWS what faculty consider the *most* important concepts in the TWS: planning, assessing, and understanding the ‘big picture’ of teaching and learning in classrooms. An extreme example of this possibility came from the Question #15 teacher candidate data: “[I] can’t think of anything [beneficial]. It was not relevant to what I teach”. Fortunately, this was the only negative exemplar in the current data set. It does, however, speak to the profound impact that issues beyond the TWS can have on a teacher candidate’s perceptions of the benefits of their teacher education program’ curriculum.

Next Steps

In conducting a preliminary analysis of initial data, the research team has identified some modifications to the survey and data collection procedures that we believe have the potential to add to our understanding of the Work Sample Experience of faculty and teacher candidates in substantial ways.

We were somewhat surprised to find no significant differences in many of the variables that we initially identified. However, one variable that we did not account for when gathering demographic data was the level of authorization that teacher candidates were pursuing. We will add a ‘elementary – secondary’ item to the next iteration of the survey. Anecdotally, teacher education faculty often refer to fundamental differences between teacher candidates who choose

to pursue a career in elementary education and those who focus on secondary teaching. Will the data support our lived experiences – perhaps, perhaps not?

We also saw a pattern in the narrative responses to the open-ended questions at the end of the survey that may have been influenced by the wording of the first nine (9) Likert-scale prompts on the survey. The phrase “. . .help(s) student teachers” was used repeatedly in the initial prompts. Many of the respondents, both faculty and teacher candidates, used that wording as a foundation for their responses to questions #15 and #16. Since we can’t change the format of the survey in the middle of the study, we’ll change the procedure. In the next data collection period for teacher candidates, they will be directed to respond to the open-ended questions first, and then complete the survey.

The Work Sample Experience study has already revealed useful data for individual institutions regarding practices and procedures related to the role of the TWS in teacher education curriculum, evaluating work samples, and the role that the TWS methodology plays in the learning to teach process. The Work Sample Experience research team anticipates that there will be even more to gain from the next phase of the data collection and analysis.

APPENDICES

A. Work Sample Experience Survey – Students

B. Work Sample Experience Survey – Faculty

Appendix A

Work Sample Authenticity Survey

STUDENTS

Thank you for your participation. This survey is designed to elicit Oregon college students' perceptions of the authenticity of the work sample in their teacher education program. Your honest feedback will enable a thorough examination of the data.

The survey includes three sections. Sections One and Two require responses on the scantron sheet, while section Three responses are to be written on the Brief Answer Response Sheet. The survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete, at which time please return the scantron sheet and the Brief Answer Response Sheet to your instructor or other individual collecting the surveys.

SECTION ONE: DEMOGRAPHICS

Please read through the instructions carefully. The demographic information being collected does not always match the heading on the scantron sheet provided.

1. NAME: **DO NOT** fill in this box. These surveys will remain completely anonymous.
2. SEX: Fill in gender.
3. BIRTHDATE: Fill in birthdate.
4. IDENTIFICATION NUMBER: **DO NOT** fill in this box.
5. SPECIAL CODES: Fill in the Colleague ID number for the institution you are attending from the list below.

SECTION TWO: QUANTITATIVE RESPONSES

Please read through the instructions for each question carefully. Fill in the appropriate bubble on the scantron sheet provided.

1. How many work samples have you completed?
 - A. One
 - B. Two
 - C. Three
 - D. More
2. What type of teacher education program are you completing?
 - A. Undergraduate licensure program
 - B. Full-time Masters degree with licensure
 - C. Part-time Masters degree with licensure
 - D. Full-time Graduate student, license only
 - E. Part-time Graduate student, license only

Please rate questions 3-14 on a scale of 1-5.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-unsure 4-agree 5- strongly agree

3. Designing a unit of instruction helped me make sense of the curriculum and provided valuable experience in dividing course content into manageable daily instructional plans.

4. Investigating and reporting on the community, school, classroom and student context issues informed my planning and teaching of the work sample.
5. Designing detailed lesson plans helped me to create lessons that met my unit goals.
6. Pre and post assessments helped me measure student learning over the course of the unit.
7. Daily, formative assessments helped me modify lessons to meet student needs.
8. The thorough analysis of assessment data helped me to see the importance of examining individual learning gains thoroughly for the benefit of every student.
9. Written reflections after daily lessons helped me be more aware of modifications needed in order to meet the needs of all students as I continued to teach this unit.
10. Reporting student progress to the students and their parents was a natural part of the work sample process that allowed me to share important feedback.
11. The final reflections after teaching the work sample helped me identify and describe improvements I can make in my future teaching in order to meet the needs of all students.
12. The overall work sample process provided an effective structure to guide me through instructional planning and assessment *during my student teaching experience*.
13. The work sample process has had an impact on the teaching processes I will implement *in my own classroom in the future*.
14. I believe the work sample process is an authentic way of making me aware of all the aspects of planning, teaching, and assessing an instructional unit.

Work Sample Authenticity Survey (continued)

Brief Answer Response Sheet

Name of Institution: _____

Program: _____

- Options:
- Undergraduate licensure program
 - Full-time Masters degree with licensure
 - Part-time Masters degree with licensure
 - Full-time Graduate student, license only
 - Part-time Graduate student, license only

Work Sample Authenticity Survey

FACULTY

This survey is designed to elicit the perceptions of faculty members and student teaching supervisors who have a role in teaching, guiding and/or assessing student teacher work samples. A similar survey is being distributed to student teachers. The research project is a collaborative effort among teacher education institutions in the state of Oregon and the defining interest is in faculty and student teacher perceptions of the authenticity of the Work Sample process and product for preservice teachers.

The survey includes three sections. Sections One and Two require responses on the *scantron* sheet, while section Three responses are to be written on the Brief Answer Response Sheet. The survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete, at which time please return the *scantron* sheet and the Brief Answer Response Sheet to the individual collecting the surveys.

SECTION ONE: DEMOGRAPHICS

Please read through the instructions carefully. The demographic information being collected does not always match the heading on the scantron sheet provided.

6. NAME: **DO NOT** fill in this box. These surveys will remain completely anonymous.
7. SEX: Fill in gender.
8. BIRTHDATE: **DO NOT** fill in this box.
9. IDENTIFICATION NUMBER: **DO NOT** fill in this box.
10. SPECIAL CODES: Fill in the Colleague ID number for the institution you are attending from the list below.

SECTION TWO: QUANTITATIVE RESPONSES

Fill in the appropriate bubble on the scantron sheet provided.

17. Do you teach any course(s) other than practicum supervision in which the work sample process or product are included in course outcomes or requirements?
A. Yes B. No
18. Do you teach any course(s) other than practicum supervision designed to address elements of instruction and/or assessment that are part of a work sample?
A. Yes B. No
19. Do you assess student teacher work samples?
A. Yes B. No

Please rate questions 4-14 on a scale of 1-5.

1-strongly disagree 2-disagree 3-unsure 4-agree 5- strongly agree

20. Investigating and reporting on the community, school, classroom and student context issues informs student teachers' planning and teaching.

21. Designing detailed lesson plans helps student teachers develop essential planning practices for effective instruction.
22. Pre and post assessments help student teachers measure student learning over the course of the unit.
23. Daily, formative assessments help student teachers modify lessons to meet student needs.
24. The thorough analysis of assessment data helps student teachers see the importance of examining individual learning gains thoroughly for the benefit of every student.
25. Written reflections after daily lessons help student teachers be more aware of modifications needed in order to meet the needs of all students.
26. Reporting student progress to the students and their parents is a natural part of the work sample process that allows student teachers to share important feedback.
27. The final reflections after teaching the work sample help student teachers identify and describe improvements they can make in future teaching in order to meet the needs of all students.
28. The overall work sample process provides an effective structure to guide student teachers through instructional planning and assessment *during their student teaching experience*.
29. I believe the work sample process is an authentic way of **teaching** students all the aspects of effective planning, teaching and assessing an instructional unit.
- 14 I believe the work sample is an authentic way of **evaluating** student teachers' abilities to plan, teach and assess an instructional unit.

Work Sample Authenticity Survey (continued)

FACULTY

Brief Answer Response Sheet

Name of Institution: _____

Role in work sample preparation: (circle one for each statement)

I teach methods of instruction and/or assessment.

Yes

No

I teach courses specifically including work sample elements.	Yes	No
I assess student teacher work samples.	Yes	No

SECTION THREE: QUALITATIVE RESPONSES

Please provide brief answers to the following questions. Please write your answers directly on this form. Do not use the *scantron* sheet.

15. In what ways is the work sample process and product beneficial in the development of effective teachers?

16. What, if anything, would you change about the work sample requirements to make the process and product more beneficial in the development of effective teachers?