TEACHING ASSIGNMENTS
AND
CONDITIONS OF WORK

Prepared for the O-QAT Title-II
Initiative 3.1 Continuing Licensure
Design Team

March 6, 2002

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Synopsis

Questions Pursued

1. Where do the early career teachers studied get hired?
2. What characteristics do these schools have?
3. How do these schools compare to the schools in which they did their student teaching?
4. What is the nature of their teaching assignments?
5. How well prepared do these beginning teachers feel to teach in their current contexts?

Data Collection Sources/Methods

Design. Descriptive information on teaching assignments and conditions of work were collected within a follow-along study.

Measures. A mix of data collection methods and sources has been used to describe the teaching contexts of these beginning teachers. These include: structured interviews with individual teachers during their first year of teaching; annual descriptions of aspects of their classroom and school contexts on the open-ended portion of a Self-Assessment instrument; a school climate survey and a classroom demographics form were included as part of a suite of surveys administered annually; a description of their teaching context as part of a Teacher Effectiveness Portfolio prepared during their first and second years of teaching; and extant databases maintained by the Oregon Department of Education containing information on school and district size, SES rank, and performance on statewide assessments at grades three and five for the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 School Years.

Sample. Seventy-seven first year teachers.

Key Findings

Where do early career teachers get hired?

✓ The majority of participants (70%) were hired into districts in the Portland metropolitan area and the Willamette Valley.
✓ 14.3% of participants were hired into urban/inner-city schools; 32.5% into suburban schools; 15.6% into small city school districts; 29.9% into what can only be considered rural schools, and an additional 7.8% into what must be considered isolated rural schools.
✓ The size of the schools in which these early career teachers were hired varied immensely. The smallest had 16 students; the largest (a middle school) had 775 students. The size of the districts in which these teachers were hired also varied a great deal. The smallest district had 189 students; the largest had 53,587 students.

What characteristics do these schools have?

✓ The majority of the beginning elementary teachers studied work in a K-5 or K-6 configured school (80.5%).
✓ About 6 in 10 (61.6%) of these new teachers felt that their school operated as a standards-based school.
✓ While about 4 out of 5 teachers (78.9%) felt that their principal was interested in and supported innovation, only about 2/3 (68.4%) felt that their principal let them know what was expected of them as a first year teacher.
✓ While only about 6 in 10 of these beginning teachers (63.1%) indicated that there was a good deal of collaborative effort among staff, about 8 in 10 (78.9%) said that they could count on other teachers to help them out when they needed help.

How do the schools in which these teachers worked compare to the schools in which they did their student teaching contexts?

✓ Nearly one-quarter of the participants were hired into the same school or district in which they did their student teaching.
✓ An additional 23.3% felt that their current teaching context was very similar to the context in which they did their
A large percentage (34.2%) felt that their current teaching context was vastly different from the context in which they did their student teaching.

What is the nature of their teaching assignments?

- These beginning teachers taught students in all elementary grade levels.
- Nearly half of the participants taught at a “benchmark” grade (grades 3 or 5) in which state tests are administered annually.
- The vast majority of teachers taught classes made up of students in a single grade level (81.1%). The remainder (18.9%) taught multi-grade classes.

How well prepared do these beginning teachers feel to teach in their current settings?

- About 60% of these early career teachers felt reasonably well, or very well, prepared to teach in their current context.
- About 40% felt minimally or not at all prepared to teach in their current context.

Potential Implications for CONTINUING Licensure

1. Teachers needing to enroll in a continuing licensure program are distributed throughout the state, creating a potential challenge for both programs and individuals to overcome distances, especially for teachers outside the Willamette Valley.
2. Teachers needing to obtain a continuing license are teaching in a wide variety of schools, districts and communities.
3. The nature of some teaching contexts may make it difficult for some teachers to demonstrate some of the proficiencies needed for continuing licensure.
4. Providing some mechanism for “leveling the playing field” within the continuing licensure system seems critical to ensure equity.

Potential Implication for INITIAL Licensure

1. Beginning teachers need to be prepared for the stress and focus on statewide assessments that comes with teaching at a benchmark grade. A disproportionate number of beginning elementary teachers in our study were assigned to a benchmark grade.
2. Beginning teachers need to be prepared to deal with the realities of life in all types of districts – from urban/inner city to rural/isolated. They are being hired everywhere.
Background and Rationale

The central objective of the TEP-2 Project (The Longitudinal Effects of Teacher Preparation on the Practice and Beliefs of New Teachers and the Learning of Their Students.) is to better understand whether selected emphases within teacher preparation programs make a difference in the practice, beliefs, and thinking of new elementary school teachers and the learning of their students in Oregon’s standards-based design for schools.

Within this broad area of inquiry one set of questions focuses on the professional development of these beginning teachers within the context of Oregon’s standards-based design for schools, and what contributes to their further development as professional educators (McConney & Schalock, 1998).

Research tells us that what teachers do, what they believe, and what and how much their students learn are all dependent upon the collective context, efforts and culture of the community, district, school and classroom in which they work. Research also tells us that the development of beginning teachers – changes in what they believe, changes in how they think, changes in how they practice their craft – is also dependent upon the context in which they work.

Oregon’s elementary schools are extremely diverse. They vary by size, grade levels, expectations, culture and climate, leadership, the students and communities they serve, resources, and attitudes towards and implementation of Oregon’s standards-based design for schools. As a result, we have paid significant attention to the contexts in which these beginning teachers find themselves—their teaching assignments and conditions of work, and the match, or mismatch between the kinds of schools in which they were prepared to teach and the kind of schools in which they actually end up teaching.

Related Research Questions

While context plays a part in the majority of analyses within the TEP-2 Project, a number of questions have been developed that focus strictly on teaching contexts in a descriptive manner. These include:

- Where do these early career teachers get hired?
- What are the characteristics of these schools?
- How do these schools compare to the schools in which they did their student teaching?
- What is the nature of their teaching assignments?
- How well prepared do these beginning teachers feel to teach within their current assignments?

This research brief will address these questions for first year teachers from both cohort one and two.

Data Collection Sources/Methods

A mix of data collection methods and sources have been used to describe contexts in which these beginning teachers work, including:

- Structured interviews with individual beginning teachers conducted during their first year of teaching (February and March, 2000 with the first cohort of teachers, and February, 2001 with the second cohort of teachers).
- Open-ended questions on a self-assessment instrument also administered during February and March, 2000 with the first cohort of teachers, and February, 2001 with the second cohort of teachers.
- A school climate survey and a classroom demographics form administered as part of a
suite of surveys collected in December, 1999 for the first cohort of teachers and December, 2000 for the second cohort.

✓ A description of the context in which they were teaching as part of their Teacher Effectiveness Portfolios.

✓ ODE extant data bases containing information pertaining to school and district size, SES rank, and performance on statewide assessments

These multiple data sources provide a well-rounded picture of the classroom, school, district and community contexts in which these beginning teachers find themselves, and their perception of preparedness within these contexts.

Results

Where did these early career teachers get hired?

Locations/Settings. As would be expected, the majority of participants were hired into districts along the I-5 Corridor (see Figure 1).

The vast majority of participants prepared out of state, or prepared at private institutions in Oregon, taught in the Portland metro area. The majority of participants prepared at Oregon public institutions taught either in southern Oregon or the Willamette Valley.

School and District Size. The size of the schools in which these early career teachers were hired varied immensely. The smallest had 16 students; the largest (a middle school) had 775 students. The size of the school District also varied a great deal. The smallest district had 189 students; the largest had 53,587 students.

Socioeconomic Status. These early career teachers serve student populations across the spectrum in terms of the ODE calculated SES rank, ranging from the 26th ranked school in the state to the 719th ranked school (out of 750+).

What are the characteristics of these schools?

The majority of these beginning teachers work in a

Figure 1. Geographic Distribution of Participants

44.2% took positions in the Portland metropolitan area.

An additional 26% took positions within the Willamette Valley.

A significant number of participants took positions in Southern Oregon (15.6%).

The remaining 14.2% took positions around the rest of the state, with 1.3% on the coast, 7.8% on the Columbia River, and 2.6% in both Eastern and Central Oregon.

Similarly, 14.3% of participants were hired into urban/inner-city schools; and 32.5% into suburban schools. An additional 15.6% were hired into small city school districts. Surprisingly, 29.9% were hired into rural schools, and an additional 7.8% into what must be considered isolated rural schools (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Types of Communities in Which Participants Teach

The vast majority of participants prepared out of state, or prepared at private institutions in Oregon, taught in the Portland metro area. The majority of participants prepared at Oregon public institutions taught either in southern Oregon or the Willamette Valley.

School and District Size. The size of the schools in which these early career teachers were hired varied immensely. The smallest had 16 students; the largest (a middle school) had 775 students. The size of the school District also varied a great deal. The smallest district had 189 students; the largest had 53,587 students.

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What are the characteristics of these schools?

The majority of these beginning teachers work in a
K-5 or K-6 configured school (80.5%). Other configurations include K-2/3, K-4, K-8, K-12, 4-6, 4-8, and 6-8. This distribution is shown in Figure 3.

![Figure 3. School Configurations in which Participants Teach](image)

**Student Performance.** Student performance on the statewide assessments varied widely in the schools in which these early career teachers were hired. At the third grade, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards ranged from 43% to 100% in Reading & Literature, and from 25% to 97% in Mathematics.

**Standards-Based Schools.** A number of participants were not sure exactly what a “standards-based” school was, but took it to mean a school in which curriculum, instruction, and assessment is organized around the state benchmarked content standards.

About 6 in 10 (61.6%) of these new teachers felt that their school was standards-based (see Figure 4).

![Figure 4. Degree to Which School is Standards-Based](image)

An additional 8.2% felt that their school was “standards-based”, but that this was a source of conflict within the faculty who felt that a “child-based” approach to schooling was preferable and in conflict with a “standards-based” approach. More than a fifth (21.9%) of the participating teachers felt that their school was “somewhat” standards-based. They felt that the benchmarked content standards and assessments were only one of a number of forces shaping curriculum, instruction, and assessment within the school.

Very few participants (2.7%) felt that standards and assessments played a limited or non-existent role in their school. Only slightly more (5.5%) felt that their school was just starting to move toward a standards-based approach to schooling.

**School Climate.** These first year teachers worked in schools with a variety of cultures and climates. While about 4 out of 5 teachers (78.9%) felt that their principal was interested in and supportive of innovation, only about 2 out of 3 (68.4%) felt that their principal let them know what was expected of them as a first year teacher.

Roughly 2/3 of these first year teachers (65.8%), felt that the goals and priorities of the school were clear. Roughly the same percentage (68.5%) felt that there was broad agreement among faculty at their school about the mission of the school.

While only about 6 in 10 of these beginning teachers (63.1%) indicated that there was a good deal of collaborative effort among staff, about 8 in 10 (78.9%) said that they could count on other teachers to help them out when they needed help.

Almost one third of these teachers (30.1%) indicated that student attitudes in their school interfered with academic success. About 1 in 6 (15.7%) indicated that student behavior in their school interfered with teaching.

**How do the schools in which these teachers taught compare to the schools in which they did their student teaching?**

**Previous Experiences.** A full 15% of the participants were hired into the same school in which they did their student teaching. An
additional 8% were hired into the **same district** in which they did their student teaching.

**Similarity to Student Teaching.** A sizable portion of the participants (13.7%) are teaching in the same building, and sometimes the same grade, in which they did their student teaching (see Figure 5).

![Figure 5. Similarity of Current Teaching Context and Student Teaching Context](image)

An additional 23.3% felt that their current teaching context was very similar to the context in which they did their student teaching.

About one in seven (15.1%) of the participants felt that their current teaching context shared both similarities and differences to the context in which they did their student teaching.

Another 13.7% of participants felt that their current teaching context was quite different from the context in which they did their student teaching, and a large percentage (34.2%) felt that their current teaching context was vastly different.

**What is the nature of their teaching assignments?**

**Grade Levels.** These beginning teachers taught students in all elementary grade levels. The most common grade level of students taught was third grade. Nearly 30% of the teachers studied taught in a classroom with third grade students (either as a straight third grade or multi-grade classroom). Figure 6 shows the distributions of the grade levels of students taught. (NOTE: Percentages do not round to 100% due to multi-grade level classrooms.)

![Figure 6. Grade Levels of Students Taught](image)

**Special Circumstances.** Several of these beginning teachers were in what might be considered special circumstances. For example, several were teaching in classrooms where all students spoke English as a second language. Two of these beginning teachers were in very small schools where they were the only teacher. One teacher taught in a private elementary school. Two teachers taught self-contained sixth grade classrooms within a middle school.

**Benchmark Grades.** Participants were evenly split between teaching assignments at a benchmark grade and non-benchmark grades (see Figure 6).
under half (48.1%) taught classes that had students at a benchmark grade (grade three or five). The remaining 51.9% taught classes that had students who were not at a benchmark grade (Kindergarten, grades one or two, or grades four and six). While the majority of teachers prepared within Oregon taught at benchmark grades, only 3 out of the 16 participants prepared out of state taught at a benchmark grade. The vast majority of teachers taught classes made up of students in a single grade level (81.1%). The remainder (18.9%) taught multi-grade level classes.

How well prepared do these beginning teachers feel to teach in their current settings?

Preparedness. The degree to which participants felt they were prepared to teach in their current settings depends to some degree on how similar their current teaching context is to the context in which they did their student teaching. It would appear, however, that this alignment does not fully explain these teachers’ perception of their preparedness (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Level of Perceived Preparedness for Current Teaching Assignment

Only 14.3% of the sample studied felt very well prepared to teach in their current context, while 44.2% felt reasonably well prepared.

About one-quarter (24.7%) of these early career teachers felt poorly, or minimally prepared to teach in their current context, and about one-in-six (16.9%) felt they were not at all prepared.

Summary

These teachers were hired into and are working in a variety of settings that mirror fairly well the diversity of schools and districts in Oregon in terms of geographic location, size, student performance, and socio-economic status. About 7 in 10 of these beginning teachers teach in what they believe to be a standards-based school where the principal is helpful and there is agreement about school goals and missions. They teach at all elementary grade levels, though roughly half teach students who are at a benchmark grade. Nearly half of the beginning teachers studied (48.1%) felt their current teaching context was very different from the context in which they did their student teaching. Even so, well over half (58%) of these beginning teachers felt well prepared to teach in their current contexts. Seventeen percent felt that their preparation program and student teaching experiences had not prepared them at all for their current teaching assignment.

References