



A Juggling Act:

CTE Student Teaching as a Full-time Teacher

By Deanna Schultz, Debbie Stanislawski & Diane Klemme



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he shortage of career and technical education (CTE) teachers has compelled secondary school administrators to seek alternative ways of staffing CTE classrooms. Increasing enrollments of K–12 students, an 8% annual attrition of teachers from all disciplines leaving the field, and declining enrollments in teacher education programs (35% between 2009 and 2014) mean fewer qualified teachers to fill vacancies (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2019). So school districts may hire a teacher with a bachelor's degree through provisional licensing. In other cases, teacher preparation programs regularly get calls to hire candidates before they have completed student teaching. These unique situations provide rich opportunities for research.

CTE educators teaching full time while concurrently enrolled in student teaching participated in a research study to examine their experiences. This article describes the conditions and processes that allowed these experiences to occur, as well as the research study design, findings from the survey and interviews, and strategies for universities and participating schools to help individuals manage these two roles.

Teacher shortages and licensing

School districts in Wisconsin, urban and rural alike, struggle to hire career and technical educators. With fewer candidates for licensure in teacher preparation programs, institutions are feeling additional pressures to meet staffing demands. And such chronic shortages — particularly in secondary CTE in the fields of family and consumer sciences, marketing and business education, and technology education (Evers, 2016) — have led school districts to hire teacher candidates prior to their completion of student teaching. Those CTE teacher education students must have completed all the necessary requirements of a CTE teacher education program except student teaching and have sufficient university credits to graduate. They also must meet the hiring criteria under a Wisconsin experience-based license or a license with stipulations — what are considered Tier 1 licenses (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.)

Study design

In the fall of 2021, three faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Stout (UW-Stout) began a yearlong study to examine how serving as a full-time teacher while simultaneously student teaching would impact the student's experience and perceptions of teaching. The impetus for conducting this study was to learn about the supports that may be beneficial to student-teacher success, from both the university and the school district. In addition, the findings can inform program review and design of clinical placements in these full-time teaching scenarios.

The study, which took place during 2021–22, included all 17 student teachers who were employed in full-time teaching positions.

After receiving approval from UW-Stout's Institutional Review Board, an email was sent to students asking them to complete phase one: a short, researcher-developed online survey. The survey asked participants to share how they learned about the position, why they chose this option, their classroom and other nonteaching responsibilities, and their demographic information. The survey also asked respondents if they wanted to participate in phase two, a follow-up interview with one of the researchers. A researcher-developed interview guide provided a consistent set of questions that focused on support, challenges and advice for others considering this role.

Recommendations from survey and interview findings

Participants learned about the open teaching positions in a variety of ways and had various reasons for pursuing a full-time position prior to student teaching. The most common way participants learned about job opportunities was through a school administrator or a teacher who contacted them. And when asked why, most said it was the opportunity to earn money while student teaching. Other reasons included participants feeling ready to teach on their own and being attracted to a district's geographic area. Further, some of the respondents were older adults pursuing teaching as a second career. And so, having held other full-time positions, they may have felt more prepared for a full-time teaching position.

Interview results indicated a variety of supports that the participants found helpful and perceived would be helpful for future students in similar situations. From those findings, the researchers developed the following strategies.

Strategies for postsecondary teacher educators

Provide coaching to help new teachers navigate the transition.

New professionals who accept a full-time position before completing a semester of student teaching may not fully understand the implications. This was summed up well by one participant who said, "If you were questioning if you want to teach, this is not the path." Another respondent indicated the importance of "being confident and having passion for both working with the students and the material that you're going to teach." University advisors and clinical placement staff must coach preservice teachers about the challenges and opportunities of pursuing a full-time position that would require simultaneous student teaching for licensure.

Offer targeted support in classroom management.

Most student teachers responded that they had challenges with classroom management. One even suggested that students "will eat [a new teacher] alive" if they aren't confident while fully in charge of a classroom. But the new teachers in the survey recognized the need for support from their mentor teachers and reached out for guidance.

Research confirms that classroom management is challenging for new teachers, and preservice opportunities for practice can help build their confidence in this area (Lew & Nelson, 2016). University supervisors can provide actionable strategies for the student teacher to use as alternatives in their toolbox. Also, classroom management can be an excellent topic for peer collaboration among student teachers; discussion groups allow students to share situations and strategies to address them.

Plan structured meetings with stakeholders.

Research suggests that the triad of the student teacher, expert cooperating teacher, and university supervisor is essential for successful teacher preparation (Ellerbrock et al., 2019). Collaboration and clear communication about the responsibilities and expectations of each person results in a stronger experience. In this study, supervisory observations — whether from a university supervisor, mentor or administrator — were cited as most helpful. These findings are a good reminder that these teachers are still learning how to teach, despite being hired into a full-time position. It is important that the university supervisor and cooperating teacher engage with school administration to ensure they allow the student teacher the learning opportunities required for licensure (e.g., placements in different content areas), which may involve flexibility with their instructional responsibilities.

Conduct observations during student teaching.

Student teaching is the time when preservice teachers implement all they have learned in their preparation program into a classroom over a period of time. According to Darling-Hammond (2014), a critical component of this clinical experience is "systematic reflection on student learning in relation to teaching and accompanied by feedback, with opportunities to retry and continue to improve" (p. 552). The student teachers recognized the value of guidance and support provided by the university supervisor and program director. The feedback student teachers received helped them feel confident in their success as a teacher. This type of supported clinical experience has been shown in other research to result in higher retention for

both the preservice teacher and the mentor/coach as it creates a new leadership pathway for experienced teachers (Rosenberg & Miles, 2018).

Strategies for K-12 administrators



Plan for mentoring and administrative support.

The new teachers in this study who conducted regular meetings with their mentors felt well-supported in their experiences. Observational feedback and support received from a mentor or cooperating teacher can help the student teacher “see how personality factors, subject matter knowledge and teaching techniques work together to bring about pupil learning” (Henry & Weber, 2010). School districts play an important role in selecting cooperating teachers, providing administrative support and securing additional mentors as needed for student teachers employed full time. One interviewee noted how their school district assigned a mentor, along with a retired teacher and other teachers in the department, who were very helpful in providing resources and support.



Develop high-quality CTE curricula.

Several participants indicated that they had little curriculum available for the classes they were asked to teach; they were expected to develop the curriculum themselves. This suggests an opportunity for school districts to utilize the *ACTE Quality CTE Program of Study Framework* (2018). Develop and document curricula that is aligned with standards and sequenced to help students to transition across secondary and postsecondary education. In Wisconsin, many school districts have CTE coordinators who can provide leadership in this work.



Reduce the load.

Traditional student teaching involves a cycle of engaging the student teacher in instructional and non-instructional activities until they develop the confidence and skills to build a teaching load like that of the cooperating teacher (Henry & Weber, 2010). Since student teachers teaching full time are not afforded this systematic building of the load, they would benefit from additional onboarding activities. The student teachers who participated in this study believed that time spent observing other teachers would be beneficial

since they do not have a traditional experience with observing their cooperating teacher. These observations “can be part of the process of discovery where a student teacher engages in self-analysis by comparing his skills with those of others” (Henry & Weber, 2010).

Summary

The participants in this study were confident in their desire to become teachers and in their ability to teach. They recognized this was important for being able to succeed in both roles simultaneously. Relevant strategies focus on building support networks — providing student teachers with coaching and mentoring, ongoing structured meetings, discussions on classroom management, and in-depth feedback after classroom observations.

Support from mentors, other teachers, and university faculty is important for any student teacher, and the participants in this study recognized this as well.

Unlike traditional student teaching in which students have limited teaching schedules, these student teachers taught full time and had little time for additional learning opportunities that are typical in student teaching. The participants identified several items that would be helpful during the first semester, including the opportunity to observe other classes, receive more feedback from building personnel, meet with other teachers to gain a sense of the student populations, and develop a deeper understanding of course objectives and curricula. Overall, the students reported a positive experience in their first semester as teachers while also student teaching. Yet they missed some learning experiences that could have been beneficial. Further longitudinal research with these individuals will determine whether the experience affected their long-term commitment to teaching. ■

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