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Abstract

Pre-service teacher education programs focus on pedagogy, often with little attention to the school environment. During internships, pre-service teachers experience unique school cultures without understanding that these vary, consequently, completing the internship with the mistaken notion that all schools are like their intern experiences. An assignment to help pre-service teachers understand the nature of schools drew upon *The Truth About School Violence: Keeping Healthy Schools Safe*, by Jared Scherz. Interns wrote about everyday situations they observed at their schools and linked these to elements of healthy schools identified by Scherz: adaptability, infrastructure, and climate. Students described and classified their observations and reactions to them in brief papers. The purpose of this paper is to describe how the students' concept of schools as organizations developed. Participant responses were grouped into themes: negative qualities, positive qualities, personal insights/judgments, naiveté, and confusion. These themes reflected how notions about schools and self changed and developed.

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Making Sense of Schools: Perceptions of Student Teacher Interns

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ABSTRACT

Pre-service teacher education programs focus on pedagogy, often with little attention to the school environment. During internships, pre-service teachers experience unique school cultures without understanding that these vary, consequently, completing the internship with the mistaken notion that all schools are like their intern experiences.

*An assignment to help pre-service teachers understand the nature of schools drew upon *The Truth About School Violence: Keeping Healthy Schools Safe*, by Jared Scherz. Interns wrote about everyday situations they observed at their schools and linked these to elements of healthy schools identified by Scherz: adaptability, infrastructure, and climate. Students described and classified their observations and reactions to them in brief papers.*

The purpose of this paper is to describe how the students' concept of schools as organizations developed. Participant responses were grouped into themes: negative qualities, positive qualities, personal insights/judgments, naiveté, and confusion. These themes reflected how notions about schools and self changed and developed.

In designing teacher education programs, a tension exists between adequately addressing basic standards set by INTASC and the state as well as accrediting bodies such as National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) along with covering topics that extend beyond the basics. With issues such as high teacher turnover and the well documented “reality shock” expressed by beginning teachers, education researchers have highlighted the need for teacher preparation programs to teach candidates about schools as organizations (Blasé, 1985; Beyer, 1989; Kuzmic, 1994) in addition to pedagogical knowledge.

Preparing teacher candidates to be active citizens in schools once they begin their first jobs requires knowledge of schools as organizations (Blasé, 1985). Most teacher education programs focus on the technical aspect of teaching—or “how to teach”—while little attention is typically given to the organizational realities of teaching in schools, or the social and historical context of schooling and teaching (Kuzmic, 1994). Additionally, schools possess unique organizational characteristics that are seldom addressed in teacher preparation programs.

Critics have emphasized the need to contextualize education within a broader societal context. They have also brought attention to the importance of viewing teaching, learning, and the process of schooling itself, as well as teacher preparation, not merely as mechanical activities, but as moral, political, and personal activities which foster reflection, inquiry, and engaged practice (Beyer, 1989). Such a view requires that teacher education programs expand curriculum beyond the classroom walls. As well, it indicates that simply encouraging preservice teachers to develop a critical and reflective perspective does little to contribute to their understandings of schools as bureaucratic organizations (Kuzmic, 1994).

Kuzmic (1994) used a case study to document how a beginning teacher’s idealism and enthusiasm for innovation were suppressed by unanticipated realities. He found that beginning teachers’ efforts were hijacked due

to the struggles related to school bureaucracy and facets of the job seemingly unrelated to teaching and learning. Many beginning teachers, in spite of being in schools as interns, have very little understanding of how schools operate as bureaucratic organizations or how these functions impact how a teacher runs a classroom. Beginning teachers are often shocked by the realization of how much of being a teacher extends beyond just “educational” activities.

Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) studied praxis shock, both in beginning teachers and to a lesser extent in student teachers, and found that teachers are often besieged with the demands of the profession. Blasé (1985) suggests that without some basic understanding of the organizational life of schools, interns and beginning teachers may not be ready to deal with the problems and quandaries encountered in schools. The purpose of this study was to describe how teacher candidates’ concepts of schools as organizations developed during their internship experiences. Kuzmic (1994) argues for the inclusion of organizational sensemaking when preparing teachers as reflective practitioners.

In this study, teacher candidates were dually enrolled in an internship and a professional role development course and were given an assignment that provided a lens with which to view schools as organizations. Candidates enrolled in the course were asked to write reflections about their student teaching internship experiences. The class was assigned to read *The Truth About School Violence: Keeping Healthy Schools Safe*, by Jared M. Scherz (2006), which addresses student violence through a contextual lens. Scherz presents three dimensions of school organizational health: adaptation, climate, and change. Specific topics such as types of adaptation and change, school climate and culture, leadership, morale, autonomy, and the physical infrastructure are discussed more fully. The instructor provided additional information about schools as organizations throughout the course. Candidates were asked to identify and write about events and situations that related to the topics covered in the book and in class along

with their personal reflections.

Candidate responses were candid and often insightful. Several themes emerged from their writings. Their writing noted positive and negative attributes in their schools and they often made judgments about the schools or specific situations they observed. Our distinction between positive and negative observations and positive and negative judgments lies in the degree to which the writer expounded upon the observation or editorialized about it. The former (observations) we deemed to be reporting what they observed. Judgments went beyond mere reporting. Often the writing reflected considerable naivety or confusion. It was clear that many of these teacher candidates were attempting to make sense of their experiences, resulting in lessons learned or significant personal insights. These themes will be presented more fully below.

Because the first author was the instructor for this course, and to preserve students' confidentiality, copies of the written responses were redacted so that references to individuals or school sites were edited out. The second author, who had no personal connection with the students, performed the initial data analysis.

FINDINGS

One of the main goals in teacher preparation programs, in addition to developing pedagogical skills and content mastery, is to foster teacher identity formation. Pre-service candidates rarely fully understand the realities of schools, often, even after they have completed their student teaching/internship experiences. The professional role development course readings described above served as a frame against which pre-service candidates could make sense of their student teaching/internship. The assigned writing (reflections on candidate's experiences) created a structure for sensemaking and for articulating new learning.

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE OBSERVATIONS

Positive comments and observations about a candidate's school or their experiences were either generalized praise, often citing Scherz's (2006) criteria for healthy schools, or the writers' comments about specific event(s). Two students offered general praise based on Scherz's (2006) criteria. Student #4 praised her school for the alignment she perceived between mission and behavior: "You would not even have to read the statement to feel and see the sense of community in this school." She praised the school's "strong leader," a principal "who accommodated everyone's needs in a problem solving manner." She appreciated the way he "talks with students" to help shape positive behavior. She believed the principal was well liked, that trust existed in the school, and that teachers felt satisfied and took pride in their work. She characterized staff meetings as "open minded meetings" where staff felt "free to offer opinions" and where "the principal listens." She praised the physical environment of the school, appreciated the many parent volunteers, and described the community as welcoming.

Writer #8 based her comments on observations of teachers, administrators, and other staff in conferences, staff meetings, in the halls, and in the faculty lounge. She wrote, "Based on my observations, [name of school] is a healthy school." She cited strong leadership that allowed a lot of autonomy in staff and teacher decisions about flexible scheduling of parent teacher conferences, which the principal supported despite criticism from the superintendent. She perceived an alignment of policies and procedures with mission, again citing the flexible conference scheduling as evidence.

Writer #9 praised the building administration for encouraging staff to meet with students who received Fs on tests. She reported that the strategy seemed to be working, because she was seeing a decrease in failures. However, she acknowledged that the conferencing strategy was dependent on parent cooperation. Student #20 described how teachers addressed a problem in schedule, which had young children "going too

long without a break.” The teachers implemented the new plan without informing the principal, she wrote, “I was shocked they had not mentioned [the schedule change] to him.” She attended a meeting with the teacher leaders and the principal and “decided to keep my mouth closed and to just observe,” witnessing a teacher driven initiative and an unintended boundary violation (authority to change schedule) and satisfactory outcome. Student #20 praised the professionalism of the teachers and principal.

Comments and observations that negatively characterized the school or the internship experience made fewer references to Scherz’s (2006) criteria for healthy schools. These comments referenced general tension or lack of professionalism and inconsistencies between stated rules and practice. Student #3 acknowledged the ever-changing demands on educators noting that teachers and administrators encounter many struggles, with some arguing for change and some demanding the right to stick to their old ways. “This causes tension and frustration in the work environment.” Another writer, also referring to tensions she observed stated, “It is hard to work in an environment where teachers do not work together with the administration” (#1).

The other major negative observation centered on the staff’s lack of consistency in punishment (#2) while candidate #1 was frustrated and dismayed that either the teachers nor the administration enforce these rules. An example at one site was a “no hats” rule, which was not enforced by all staff members.

JUDGMENTS

The majority of judgments were critical; however, writer #16’s assessment, drawing heavily on Scherz’s (2006) criteria, was the exception. Citing the physical environment, positive school spirit, strong leadership, and staff involvement, writer #16 stated, “I enjoy entering the school every day. I feel good about how my day will turn out knowing that I am surrounded by a positive environment, supportive staff, and

outstanding policies. I do not think they are doing their jobs just to produce statistical results.” Her judgment related to how she perceived the staff’s authenticity and motivation to act because they cared rather than to achieve “higher test scores.” Her implied judgment is that the school works for the right reasons. She wrote that she “feels at home in this environment” (#16). Such idealism is desirable in new teachers.

Negative judgments addressed some of the same issues as the negative observations. We understood these judgments as a form of sensemaking, demonstrating the writer’s reflections about their own beliefs. For example, writer #1 stated, “My school is not a healthy school. Students do not show respect to teachers or to authority in general and teachers do not show respect to students or to the principal.” Her judgment reflects her own values about a level of professionalism she expected to be present, but in her view, was not. She also elaborated about the issue of the inconsistency of enforcing rules: “Where is the policy of attendance enforced? The teachers do not see the administration enforcing it so why should they?” In this comment, writer #1 identifies strongly with the teacher perspective and implies that the responsibility for enforcement lies with the administrator. Later, she asks: “Why do students need a handbook if everything in it is just words, not logical rules that have consequences? What kind of lesson is it teaching the students? Where is the student responsibility for the school? What are the students accountable for if the rules are not upheld (#1)?” At the end of her discussion, she again holds the principal responsible: “This problem has evolved through a weak principal and a weak system. If I were in this situation I would advise the principal to hold teachers and students accountable, even if they got upset” (#1). The writer ended her paper with a caveat and a gentler, general criticism: “Please note that I do not dislike my school. I just think there are a lot of things that need to be fixed for it to run smoothly” (#1).

One final example of negative criticism involved observations of both the mentor teacher

and the staff in general. According to this writer, teacher expectations were too low. Students were allowed to sleep in class and to not complete assignments.

The mission statement is “to provide an educational program that encourages and empowers growing minds through opportunities for success,” yet I do not see the encouragement of learning. I do not see how [the teacher] can sit back and not try to engage the students more, or how he just lets them sleep in class.... There is no motivation for students to engage because he has low expectations. He has been in the school district for 20 years. Other teachers have the same low expectations that my mentor teacher does.

Ideally, mentors would be the best and most creative teachers in our school. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. The criticism reflects the writer’s frustration and dismay and may hint at one of the factors that cause early exit of the education profession.

NAIVETÉ AND CONFUSION

Pre-service teacher candidates’ writings reflected a good deal of naivety. One form of this naivety was to oversimplify a situation or to fail to see the complexity inherent in some of the problems they described. A second kind of naivety involved their notions about their access to individuals in authority in the school system and their assumptions that these authorities would care about specific issues as much as the writers. A third type of naivety, we call “hoped for” naivety because it reflects the type of idealism that is desirable in teachers.

Several writers described how difficult it was for them to work in an environment where teachers had conflicts with administration. There are often legitimate structural reasons for conflict between administration and staff to exist due to having different perspectives about issues merely because of the scope of an individual’s job. Some of this type of conflict is expected. Likewise, tensions among teacher—“teachers

are frustrated with their peers” (#9)—were also judged negatively. Writer #3 dreaded the weekly staff meeting because, in her view, “tension is always high.” These comments seemed to reflect an assumption that all teachers speak from one voice and seemed to lack understanding that for many legitimate reasons (department or grade, length of service, family circumstances, professional values and beliefs) there will often be different viewpoints among teachers.

These pre-service writers often framed the problems in overly simplistic ways, often failing to see their complexity. The comment that “Sparks began to fly and debate went on for over an hour, yet nothing was resolved” (#3) reflected a low tolerance for conflict and the assumption that complex problems can be resolved quickly and easily. Writer #2 voiced desire “to see a universal detention policy so students cannot pick sides between lenient and harsh teachers” fails to recognize that such policies are hard to create and even more difficult to enforce. It also assumes that a change in policy will solve the problem, which may not occur.

Heifetz (1994) describes two types of problems: technical and adaptive. Adaptive problems require learning and are more complex than technical problems, which are known problems with known solutions. Pre-service candidates often discussed adaptive problems as though they were technical, with easy or known solutions. For example, to address the problem of low expectations by students, writer #9 suggested the strategy of creating a competition between classes with a treat or prizes for the class “that does the best job.” The challenge of student motivation is complex and simply offering extrinsic rewards might not be effective. If students really don’t care about learning (intrinsic), then a little candy or friendly competition is unlikely to motivate. Complex problems such as a negative school culture cannot be addressed using only technical approaches. Writer #9’s perspective that the school climate reflected an overall lack of concern for academics among students and staff is a problem that cannot be addressed

without significant work with both teachers and students.

Pre-service teacher candidates often made huge leaps of faith based on input from their mentor teachers. Writer #7 didn't see the differences between two schools until the mentor pointed it out. She then took the mentor's view at face value without question and formed a "strong opinion" about the system, not understanding that the management system may not fully explain the perceived differences. Likewise, writer #10 presents an excellent review of her school using Scherz (2006) that reflected significant learning:

The common knee-jerk reaction that many schools take when an act of violence occurs equates to an emergency response to treat symptoms of an acute illness, but not find its cause. Schools often adopt policies to prevent violence without proper acknowledgement of the context in which the violence occurs; such policy establishment ignores the root of the problem.

However, the complexity of acknowledging the context in which violence occurs is enormous. The writing seems somewhat glib. The student closes by saying that Scherz's recommendations are "worth the time for school leaders to consider" (#10). There is an implied assumption that the problem of school violence can be solved by school leaders. Secondly, given what is on the plates of most school leaders today, one can hardly expect them to have the time or resources to conduct such a sophisticated analysis.

A second type of naivety involved assumptions about access to highly placed authorities such as principals and school board members. A physical education teacher candidate who described poor working conditions due to lack of funding and some unique circumstances stated:

I really think the community needs to take charge and change this situation. This is something the taxpayers need to be made more aware of. The school board should try to

educate the public about this situation. This is happening because of a poor sell by the school board to pass a levy. As a student teacher, I can't really do much about this situation. If I could do something I would. (#17)

Her comments fail to recognize the complexity of the problem or the difficulty of expressing her thoughts to "the board, the community, or the taxpayers." Because she is impacted directly, she may see the situation as a bigger problem than it may be to others. The writer also fails to see that she can talk to more accessible people, write letters to local paper, or conduct a fundraiser or community action to bring attention to the problem. Even if the individual were accessible, the writer often failed to understand the subtleties: "I would like to sit my principal down and talk about the atmosphere of the school, the policies not upheld, and the lack of respect the teachers have toward him...I would also go to the board, the district, and figure out what we as teachers can do to make it a better structured learning environment" (#1). Although well intended, writer #1's caveat that "I would not do this simply because I have only been at the school for two months and do not understand the full dynamics of the school" is more of an understatement than she realizes.

Kuzmic (1994) states that pre-service teachers have little understanding of how schools operate as bureaucratic organizations. Certainly the intent of readings such as Scherz (2006) and of writings such as those assigned and used in this study is to educate pre-service teachers to these bureaucratic realities. The advantage of a book like Scherz's is that it provided concrete criteria by which pre-service teachers could make informed judgments about the health of the school. Several writers gained such understandings to the point of realizing that despite how badly they want to be hired, they could exercise choice in the process. Writer #11's main goal was "just to get that first teaching job." She acknowledged the temptation to "blindly accept" the first offer, but stated that Scherz has taught her to "be a little bit choosier," a liberating and important perspective for these

pre-service candidates. However, the need to “see if a school is a good fit for me” (#12) also reflected a different kind of naivety:

I do have a right to be picky [about where I work] even if I do live in a small town where jobs are scarce.... I need to know if I have support.... I don't want to work in a school where nothing changes because the school will fall behind in technology and new curriculum ideas. (#5)

Like writer #5, writer #6 recognized that the selection process worked both ways, but wrote more specifically about the criteria. Her closing comment, “though I am certain that the more schools I see the more things I will be looking for,” recognized her lack of experience.

A third type of naivety reflects the kind of idealism about self-efficacy and mission-centeredness that we believe is desirable in prospective teachers. Two of the writers provide examples of this type of naivety. Writer #13 stated, “I have always liked problems and “at risk” students, so my perfect fit school might not be an ideal school but one that might need some changing.” Our society needs this type of naivety in our teachers; their mission is to make the world a better place. These teachers are willing to work hard and take on challenges. Writer #21 expressed feeling upset by the lack of recycling of paper at her school. She approached the principal casually about starting a recycling program. The principal responded favorably but thought providing recycling bins alone wouldn't be effective if students did “not see the importance of recycling.” Writer #21 thought staff should support the effort “because they have the power to influence students.” She showed responsibility and initiative by offering to “take the bins into town once a week” to help get the recycling program underway. She was willing to give extra efforts to finding solutions to the problem based on her personal values.

Pre-service candidates often seemed truly confused about some of the circumstances they encountered. Unlike the judgmental comments cited above, these comments were characterized

by an effort to make sense of the situation or to explore their own values and beliefs. Writer #1 described how students get credit for a class for which they missed too many days:

I am not sure the exact policy of receiving credit for a class with too many absences. From what other teachers have said, the student has to write a letter saying why he/she was absent so much and the district passes it through without going to the next step, which is a hearing. They receive a letter grade despite having missed more than nine days of class. Does the administration do this so their numbers look better, for dropouts and grade in general? Does the administration do this just to get the student through and out? I do not know. I also may not be reading this correctly and the school may be better than what I am depicting.

The questions she raises do not seem judgmental but are sincere queries about understanding the system. Her last line, particularly, which acknowledges lack of experience suggests she is sincerely trying to make sense of the situation. This one example, and the rarity of others among the writings of some thirty students, suggests that a stance of inquiry seems to be rarer than a stance of judgment among pre-service teacher candidates.

PERSONAL INSIGHTS

Pre-service teacher reflections on student teaching internships included four types of comments: insights about what to look for in schools, insights about the craft of teaching, insights about the nature of leadership, and insights about their values. The first type of insight, what to look for in schools was a direct and hoped for outcome of the reading by Jared M. Scherz (2006):

From reading and reflecting on *The Truth About School Violence: Keeping Schools Safe*, by Jared M. Scherz ...I have a new perspective of what to look for when interviewing for a job at an unfamiliar school. I am aware that as a first year teacher my job choices may be limited and

my primary goal will be to gain employment. (#12)

Typical of many responses was a comment by writer #13 who learned from the reading that visiting churches and restaurants in the community, checking out the school web site, or becoming a substitute teacher in the district were good strategies to learn more about a school or district. Writers generally appreciated the information they gained from the class text: “The Scherz reading opened my eyes about knowing what to look for when I walk into these alien schools” (#5). More than one writer also acknowledged the “need to start making a living” (#5). The Scherz reading seemed to provide information about how to bridge one gap in the job search process.

A second type of insight consisted of comments related to enhanced craft knowledge—the hoped for outcome of practica and internships. Writer #26 dealt with student conflict that evolved when a new student entered the class in various ways. She stated, “One small change to the environment made a huge impact on the class.” Another writer noted, “I can see the effects of lack of consistency in my own classroom” (#2). Writer #27 stated, “I will remember that organization, communication, and adaptability are the keys to a successful outcome.” This insight related to the much discussed healthy school criteria of adaptability. Writer #27 understood that adaptability also applied to her. Writer #29 intercepted a note, “followed my gut” and dug deeper. She discovered the note was “a form of retaliatory violence in the form of bullying.” The note writers had been shunned the day before. The school counselor uncovered a “cycle of bullying and violence that could have infected the class.” The discovery of the seriousness of the event caused writer #29 to reflect deeply about the incident:

All in all, the situation ended well, but still I wonder, what if I had overlooked the situation? What if I had just ignored the behaviors? What else would have happened? And how long would it have taken before someone noticed the

malicious behaviors that were occurring amongst the girls. I learned something from this: to follow my gut.

This incident proved to be a powerful learning experience. This teacher realized her responsibility and possible consequences for not acting and also discovered that her intuition was a powerful cue.

Observations about leadership formed a third kind of insight. Often beginning teachers have very little idea about what the principal really does all day. They understand leadership as authority, but often fail to understand how principals act to improve the school or student learning. Scherz (2006) contributed to their understanding because effective leadership was one of the criteria of healthy schools. Armed with the knowledge of what to look for, several writers described effective leadership with great specificity. For example, writer #15 cited a policy change relative to benefits that created “distrust among the different factions of the school district”:

A new principal, aware of the context of broken trust, used the Paradoxical Theory of change to move forward slowly until staff resilience [could] evolve to meet higher idealism for school growth. He does not promise things lightly or change policy or procedures without input from the staff. He holds regular staff meetings and invites input on issues that affect staff. His approach is changing the climate to positive and receptive. Even the students notice the change.

Writer #18 described how a new principal made several changes in schedules and routines. A change another principal made was to challenge the staff to make school a celebration of learning and a celebration of kids. As someone who has been at this school for almost a year, it is great to have life and excitement at the school. The writer commented about how these changes were received by the staff, but more importantly, began to see the connection between the principal's decisions and student learning.

A fourth type of personal insight was characterized by values clarification. Some of these values related to classroom management. For example, one writer realized that sending students “to the office just gets them out of the classroom for the rest of the period, but has no greater effect on the students” (#2). Writer #33 became aware of differing attitudes about the relationship between teaching one’s subject and standardized tests: “Some teachers are ‘teaching to the test,’ others refuse to. They say that there are more important things to teach than just those found on the test.” While not ignoring the importance of standardized tests, she was heartened by the latter group.

Writer #14 described two IEP meetings, one productive and one less so:

I did not agree with the attitude of the teachers who were not willing to work with [the student] at all. I feel the teachers were missing the point regarding his disability. Their attitude disappoints me. I thought how unfair the system is. If something like that should occur again, I will never stand up and leave. I will stay in the meeting showing respect and interest for the student.

Although this reflection seemed at first to fall into our category of judgment, #14’s last sentence seemed to reflect a clarification of personal and professional values around student advocacy. Writer #14 got very clear that she would behave differently “if I had the chance to do it all over again.” The judgment was about her own behavior as much as about the behavior of others.

Some lessons we don’t want to learn the way we do. Writer #23 related the story of a student suicide. The principal announced the incident at a staff meeting and staff related appropriate information to students. She described her experience and reactions:

He left so many people hurting and there is nothing I can do. I felt helpless. Reasoning the

situation is hard. My master teacher needed a substitute because she was really close to the student. I have learned that it is important to establish relationships with my students. They are people who happen to be taking [names subject].

As tragic as this situation was, it provided a powerful reminder to see students as individuals and underscored the importance of relationships in teaching.

DISCUSSION

Blasé (1985) advocates that organizational literacy be included in teacher education programs. The assigned reading and writing related to internship and student teaching experiences addressed this issue and we feel did increase pre-service teachers’ understanding of schools as organizations. While many of the writings showed naiveté and confusion, they were also indications that the candidates’ awareness about schools and context beyond pedagogy increased. Likewise, these assignments addressed Beyer’s (1989) and Kuzmic’s (1994) views that teacher preparation should help to develop a moral awareness, foster reflection and inquiry, and help new teachers confront the unanticipated realities in schools.

Neophyte teachers must develop an understanding of what it means to be a teacher, in addition to craft knowledge (Kuzmic, 1994). Often, such understandings come as a shock, and add to the stress and exhausting nature of a candidate’s first prolonged experience in the classroom (Flores, 2001). The course from which the candidate responses were drawn, attempted to reduce the shock factor experienced by introducing organizational realities. Kagan (1992) states that student teaching serves as a sustained final experience that is meant to bridge academic coursework and the realities of being a classroom teacher. These reading and writing assignments accomplished that goal.

Pre-service teachers noted positive and negative attributes in their schools because

Scherz (2006) gave them language and specific criteria by which to judge. Often the writing reflected considerable naivety or confusion, which one might expect from pre-service teacher, but the experiences they described reduced the gap between their assumptions and the realities they confronted. It was clear that many of these teacher candidates were attempting to make sense of their experiences, resulting in lessons learned, or significant personal insights.

Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) would label the efforts of the resulting assignment as explicit sensemaking. That is, the candidates wrote about what they saw and experienced that was different from what they expected to find or happen in schools (Weick et al.). To explicitly make sense of an event or situation brings it into existence and adds a sense of organizational literacy (Kuzmic, 1994) to a candidate's knowledge base. Candidates were actively encouraged to reflect on events and situations; view them through what Scherz (2006) wrote about as well as record their own reactions and feelings about what they saw.

The findings of this analysis suggest that candidates struggle to situate their roles and others' within the school context (Sadler, 2006). They expressed naiveté about what others should do or what they would do if they held a permanent position within the school organization. These data support the notion of addressing organizational literacy about schools during teacher preparation programs. Such an introduction does not call for an additional course, but can be added contextually into existing coursework (Kuzmic, 1994).

Pre-service teachers addressed school leadership often with naiveté. A common attribute of their remarks was to oversimplify complex situations or fail to recognize the larger context in which the situation arose. Brouwer and Korthagen (2005) would argue such responses indicate the beginnings of occupational socialization and understanding of the school context—which they deem important for beginning teachers to grasp basic knowledge.

Furthermore, by lessening the “reality shock” that many interns and beginning teachers experience, Chubbuck, Clift, Allard, and Quinlan (2001) believe that the attrition rate of novice teachers may actually decrease. The assignment analyzed in this study created an avenue of “early introduction” of what could have become reality shock for a beginning teacher entering the profession. Because the assignment was completed in an environment where teacher candidates felt safe, Edmonson (1999) suggests that the likelihood of beginning teacher “reality shock” is mitigated.

RECAP AND IMPLICATIONS

Preservice teacher candidates enrolled in a professional role development course in conjunction with their student teaching internships were given a reading assignment in combination with the internship experience. The assignment was intended to foster teacher identity formation as well as increase candidates' understanding of schools as organizations and the complex context in which schools operate. The class read *The Truth About School Violence: Keeping Healthy Schools Safe*, by Jared M. Scherz (2006), which addressed adaptation, climate, and change as three dimensions of healthy schools and received additional information about schools as organizations throughout the course. Candidates were asked to write about situations and events addressed in the book as part of their personal reflections. Candidate responses indicated explicit sensemaking (Weick, 1995) about school contexts and several themes manifested from their writings: positive and negative attributes candidates perceived in their schools; judgments about the school or specific situations they observed; naivety or confusion; finally, lessons learned and significant personal insights.

A gap exists between what is taught and covered in teacher education programs and what teacher candidates need to know and be able to do as they enter into schools for sustained internships or experiences. The authors believe that it is vital for teacher preparation

programs to include elements that assist teacher candidates to understand and learn more beyond pedagogical knowledge and teaching in a classroom. This study illustrates that by adding a reading assignment such as Scherz (2006) that provides criteria for understanding schools as organizations and by building in opportunities to express their understandings of organizations into class discussions, teacher candidates will be better prepared to fulfill their professional roles. Such understandings will enable preservice teachers to perform their role better, as well as recognize the constraints faced in carrying out their role and any conflicts that occur beyond the classroom (Kuzmic, 1994).

The teacher candidates whose reflections we studied appreciated the link between the reading and their actual experiences. The combination of the two resulted in significant insights about the nature of schools as organizations and about themselves as neophyte teacher professionals. We believe that the written reflections, guided by the criteria for healthy schools provided in this instance by Scherz, created a powerful opportunity for pre-service candidates to make sense of their internship experiences. We believe that this knowledge and understanding of themselves and of schools as organizations will enhance their effectiveness as new professionals. It is important for teacher educators to help teacher candidates develop, among other things, a better understanding of the environmental demands that will be placed upon them (Haritos, 2004). Therefore, we recommend that teacher preparation programs consider adding elements to their programs that would promote sensemaking of their internship experiences as well as a better understanding of schools as organizations. By adding these crucial elements we are more apt to maximize teacher candidates' development.

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