Early Childhood Preservice Teachers’ Expectation of Reality Shock during the First Year of Professional Teaching in the United States

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Abstract

This study examined whether preservice teachers’ expectations of reality shock during their first year of professional teaching differs by program type and their status in the program. A total of 292 preservice teachers enrolled in the early childhood education and elementary education program at a state university in the Midwestern United States were included in this study. To gauge preservice teachers’ expectation of reality shock, an instrument with five latent constructs was developed: self-confidence, professional training, workload, career choice, and role complexity. Model-fit indices from confirmatory factor analysis showed a good fit between the five-dimension theorization of our model and the observed data. The results showed that the early childhood preservice teachers’ expectations of reality shock experience were differentiated only by their status in the program. We discussed educational implications in lieu of preservice teachers’ sense of efficacy and reality-shock challenge in order to keep novice teachers from leaving the teaching profession.

[key words] preservice teachers, reality shock, teaching expectation, early childhood education, elementary education

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INTRODUCTION

Many novice teachers confront reality shock along with other difficulties during the first year of their professional teaching, causing the novice teachers to leave their teaching profession (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Killian & Baker, 2006; Murshidi, Konting, Elias, & Fooi, 2006; Yost, 2006). In the United States, teacher retention is a serious problem, especially in the field of early childhood education. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future reports, one third of new teachers in the United States leave the teaching profession within the first three years (NCTAF, 2003). These problems affect both the cost and the effectiveness of primary education (Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004), resulting in low teacher quality and a high turnover rate that plagues the field of early childhood education (Cha, Kang, & You, 2011; Hare & Heap, 2001; Ingersoll, 2003; Lokan, 2003; McKenzie & Santiago, 2005; Whitebook & Sakai, 2003). The teacher shortage and related problems are not limited to the United States, but also exist in many other geographical regions, forecasting further problems in the effectiveness of primary education and teacher quality in the era of globalization (OECD, 2005; Sinclair, 2008).

Various factors may cause newly qualified teachers to leave the profession, but problems in teacher education programs commonly influence teachers’ vulnerability to the loss of teaching motivation and self-efficacy (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003). Recruitment practices of teacher education programs can initiate the problem by distorting prospective participants’ decision-making in career selection, fostering unrealistic career expectations from the start. This may attract prospective teachers who are actually ill suited to the profession, setting up teachers for failure and presenting schools and school districts with the problem of perpetually having to replace staff. Further, the design of preservice teacher education programs can exacerbate the problems of low quality and high turnover rate, by failing to moderate clashes between matriculated students’ initial visions and the realities of their first-year teaching experiences—that is, failing to moderate clashes between their preferred realities, or the realities in which they hope and expect to function, and the realities that must be negotiated by the application of educational ideals in challenging school contexts (Weinstein, 1988). Such failures undermine the progress of emerging professional teachers who may be very well suited to a teaching career but quickly lose self-efficacy and motivation as they struggle through their first year of professional teaching.

Lately, as the failure to educate resilient and efficacious teachers has often been attributed to insufficient implementation of advanced teacher preparation curricula by teacher education