IMPACT OF A PRACTICUM IN EDUCATION COURSE DESIGNED TO RECRUIT STEM MAJORS INTO A TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

by

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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that the most efficient way of improving students' performance, in mathematics and science, is by recruiting and retaining highly qualified mathematics and science teachers. This study augments the body of research aimed at the recruitment of STEM majors to the field of education.

The purpose of this study was to determine how a practicum course, developed to recruit freshman and sophomore STEM majors into a teacher preparation program, impacted participants' perceptions of teaching as a profession. The impact of this course, which utilized a reflective cycle framework for evaluating participants' reflections as the foundation of the program, was studied from a phenomenological research approach that focused on the emic and etic perspectives of the practicum students.

This study sought to answer the following research questions: 1) How do STEM majors enrolled in a one-hour practicum course perceive teaching within a high school or middle school classroom environment; 2) How do college students' experiences in the course, and stages of reflection following classroom observations, affect their perception of teaching as a profession and the possible decision to enroll in a teacher preparation program; and 3) How do practicum
students relate their participation in the practicum in education course to their past, current, and future career decisions?

Data from four cohorts of college students, who took the Practicum in Education Course from 2012 – 2015, (n=54) were collected from reflection journals, pre-course information forms, exit surveys, post-course questionnaires, and follow-up interviews.

Findings suggest early education practicums should focus on implementing semi-structured reflection journals with feedback from the instructor. College students should be encouraged to participate during classroom observations by helping school-aged students, designing assignments, or co-teaching lessons. Programs should offer the opportunity for college students to observe in two different classroom environments, and also encourage these students to ask questions within journal entries to which the instructor responds. To guide the development of future courses, research should explore the view of participants who do not plan to teach after taking an education practicum course. This exploration will help researchers and course designers in determining why college STEM majors choose not to enter teaching.