

ANGELA FALTER THOMAS¹**Analyzing the Anxiety: Pre-Service Teachers in their Professional Year**

This study explored the change in perceptions of 16 pre-service teachers enrolled in their professional year. The pre-service teachers were asked to “sketch methods” at the beginning and the end of the semester. Findings show the concept of partaking in the professional year that pre-service teachers have before and after experiencing the methods coursework and its required internship. Furthermore, it studies the particulars of the changes that ensued during the methods and internship involvement. Data from the drawings reveal pre-service teachers’ perceptions of their professional year. Qualitative analysis suggest the pre-service teachers in this study feel stress and anxiety entering the semester and leave with a sense of accomplishment and pride.

Introduction*Stress & Anxiety*

Stress is a widespread phenomenon which occurs throughout the entire human lifespan (Shahsavarani, Abadi, & Kalkhoran, 2015); however, university students can face undue stress and anxiety. Anxiety has been found to be more prevalent among college students than the general population (Beiter, Nash, McCrady, Rhoades, Linscob, Clarahan & Sammut, 2014; Larson, Orr & Warne, 2016). Anxiety can put university students at greater dangers including health and academic risks.

According to Cooper & Quick (2017), stress arises when individuals perceive that they cannot adequately cope with the demands being made on them. Stress is the perception that a situation or event exceeds one’s coping resources. University students can have stress for many reasons. For example, because they are living away from their families for the first time, are experiencing more advanced levels of learning, and because of their changing social lives. High levels of stress can have negative academic, social and psychological effects. Stress at low levels can be beneficial, motivating students to perform well and preserve their mental and physical well-being; however, a majority of university students (56.8%) reported that their stress was above average or extreme

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(American College Health Association, 2018). In 2018, 33.2% of university students reported that stress interfered with their academic performance within the last year.

Stress, when not dealt with effectively, can cause anxiety (Bamber & Schneider, 2015). Anxiety is a feeling that is worsened when a person experiences extended, unresolved stress or multiple stressors (Lazarus & Folkman, 1985). Students with high levels of anxiety are more likely to have poor academic outcomes, placing them at an increased risk of failure. According to the 2018 study by the American College Health Association, 63.4% percent of university students experienced ‘overwhelming anxiety’ in the previous twelve months, and 26.5% reported that anxiety negatively impacted their academics (ACHA, 2018).

Student anxiety at the university level is an increasing and persistent problem. According to the American College of Health Association (2018), anxiety disorders are the most commonly diagnosed and treated mental health conditions on US college campuses today. Transitioning to the university necessitates students adapt to new situations and environments. As students try to adjust to new environments and situations, stress and anxiety often occurs (Bamber & Schneider, 2015). Stressors like academic tasks, job hunting, and interpersonal interaction are exerting additional pressure on students that may elicit further anxiety. Researchers have concluded that the high levels of anxiety in university students have serious consequences.

Sketching

Sketching is a novel and potentially valuable technique for exploring one’s perceptions and experiences. Sketching can foster more creative responses because language can slow down the creative process. Exploring ideas through sketching does not require the same cognitive demands as needed for writing; however, feelings and views can be thoroughly communicated by sketching (Caldwell & Moore, 1991). Attitudes, behaviors and thoughts can all be affected by emotional experiences, which may appear in one’s drawings. These same techniques can support meta-cognition and address one’s emotions.

Students’ sketches can be utilized to better understand the perceptions they hold (Cheung, Saini & Smith, 2016). Sketches by pre-service teachers can reveal dispositions, attitudes and experiences. These sketches permit individuals to ponder and establish their attitudes and feelings in a non-threatening manner.

Sketches have been used to understand one's thoughts and opinions. Researchers have studied perceptions by analyzing students' drawings in literacy (McKay & Kenrick, 2001). Drawings have provided paths for exploring students' attitudes about world and environmental issues (Alberby, 2000). Studies of students' impressions have given researchers an understanding of student perceptions toward science (Thompson & Lyons, 2008).

In art therapy, patients are often encouraged to express their emotions through pictures. Identical practices can be used to examine the sentiments of pre-service teachers tied to their professional year experience. Drawings by pre-service teachers can reveal dispositions, attitudes and experience

Context of the Study

The decision to embark on this project was fueled by university students annually expressing concern to their professors about the upcoming methods semester. Therefore, it was decided to investigate what was causing the anxiety so that these concerns could be addressed and so that changes in program, cultural context, or curriculum could potentially be made to help future students have a better, more effective and productive professional year experience.

Research Questions

The theoretical underpinning of this study is the association concerning the conscious and unconscious mind can be expressed through images therefore give a voice where it otherwise might be ignored (Hillman, 1992). Negative feelings about an experience may distort the actual experience. Visuals utilized to express a larger concept, such as the professional year, can be snapshots of certain thoughts and can be more representative. With that in mind, the following research questions were developed.

- 1) What is the perception of the professional year held by pre-service teachers at the beginning and at the end of an English language arts methods course?
- 2) What images do pre-service teachers relate to their methods experience? More specifically, what emotions are attached to methods and what types of images do they draw?

- 3) How do these images change during the course of the semester long methods course and its internship?

Methods and Procedures

Participants

Sixteen pre-service teachers were enrolled in a methods course for teaching English language arts to children. The methods course consisted of coursework on how to teach English language arts to students, and it also included an internship of field placement hours for the pre-service teachers to practice teaching children what they were learning about in their university coursework. The study took place over the course of one 16-week semester in the students' final year at the university. The course was taught by a professor who was also the researcher. While the professor intentionally took a neutral posture to learn from the students, their preconceived notions about the instructor's expectations may have influenced the drawings.

Participants were undergraduate university students from a large, Midwestern US public university completing their fourth and final year of a teacher preparation program. All pre-service teachers were Caucasian; there were fourteen females, and two males. Other than tutoring experiences and providing small group instruction, none of the participants had any prior teaching experience.

Data Collection

During the first moments of the first class session of the semester-long course, the participants were handed a sheet of paper and a packet of colored pencils. They were told to sketch a picture of "methods", referring to their university methods course. It was requested that they draw whatever came to mind, not to be concerned about their drawing ability and not to filter any images. Finally, they were told to write a few sentences on the back of their paper explaining what they sketched on the front side of their paper.

For the first ten weeks of the semester, the pre-service teachers attended the methods course on campus two days per week for a total of 220 minutes. In this face-to-face setting, students discussed readings and video clips about teaching English language arts to children. They participated in demonstrations and teaching scenarios. They analyzed the English language arts work of children and were taught how to give appropriate feedback and how to scaffold instruction

based on their analysis of the students' work. They had in class discussions about their internships and what they were doing and learning in them.

One full school day each week was spent in an internship – a field placement which consisted of a school where they were assigned an English language arts classroom to work in, and a classroom teacher to supervise them. The remaining six weeks of the semester required the university students to complete online assignments for the university professor while also participating daily in their same assigned classroom where they had already been working one day each week earlier in the semester for their internship.

On the final day of the methods course, the students returned to their university classroom. The same “sketching of methods” activity that took place on the first day of the course was repeated. The pre-service teachers were asked to sketch “methods” and write a few sentences explaining their sketch on the back. Also, they were told to explain if and how the methods course and the internship changed their views, if there was a change.

Methodology

This study utilizes a pre-post without control group quasi-experimental intrinsic case study design. Quasi-experimental designs are used to study outcome comparison of an intervention without using randomization of participants into control and intervention groups. Specifically, a pre-post without control group quasi-experimental design investigates the outcomes of interest within the same participants both before and after an intervention to see if the intervention impacted the outcomes of interest (Cook & Campbell, 1979). In this study, the university English language arts methods course and the related internship are the intervention. The focus of this research is to develop a deeper understanding and assess the impact of the English language arts methods course and the related internship (Baxter & Jack, 2008) on the university students in their professional year.

Qualitative research methods were utilized in this study in order to gain a more holistic portrayal of the university students' perceptions of their methods experience. The students' sketches and reflections about them were collected from the pre-service teachers on the first day and the final day of the course, but they were not examined until the following semester.

This study examined the symbolic images of the professional year sketched by pre-service teachers at the beginning and at the end of a methods course. The sketches were examined and sorted individually, by each researchers, to explore the original thoughts of the professional year

that pre-service teachers brought to their methods course and the changes experienced through opportunities to take a course of English language arts methods, engage with peers, and work with children in the school placements outside of the university.

Convenience sampling was utilized because the researcher was invited to study the pre-service teachers taking this methods course at the university. All 16 pre-service teachers were invited to partake in the research study and all 16 individuals consented to participate.

Data Analysis

To control for researcher bias and to help make sense of the data, two additional researchers were recruited to help conduct the data analysis. Therefore, in this study, two members of the graduate education program and the author of this study, an education professor at the university, confirmed the categories. The three researchers evaluated and reinforced the initial results, categories and groupings. This endorsement provided validity of the explanation. Then the analysis to determine the change was charted by grouping pre and post drawings and then analyzing them for positive and negative changes. This type of sorting for investigation is founded on the assessment procedure used by Rule and Harrell (2006).

Intercoder agreement was established through an analysis of discordance. Before getting started on this study's official data analysis, the researchers agreed to independently code and discuss random samples of sketches collected by another professor in a different course until 85% agreement was reached. This exceeds the acceptable level of 80% agreement between coders (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

The sketches from this study were then examined separately by the three researchers who individually sorted them to explore the thoughts and opinions of the professional year that pre-service teachers brought to their methods course and the changes experienced through opportunities to engage with peers and instructor, and work with children in their internships. First working independently with each set of data, they used selective coding to highlight the most common categories and to explain themes (Creswell, 2007). Data sets were analyzed and salient themes were devised and integrated to support assertions. Manual coding for salient themes were informed by strategies recommended by Dyson and Genishi (2005) and Saldana (2013).

The investigation of the sketches took place by examining the sketches in two groups: pre-course sketches and post-course sketches. The researchers decided to separately categorize by

negative, neutral or positive sentiments so that no one would influence the other. Next, post-course sketches were analyzed in the same manner.

The writing on the back was used to explain of the meaning behind the sketches. The sketches were categorized in two ways: negative, neutral or positive sentiments, and by classroom or real world connections. Neutral, negative and positive categories were based on whether the sketches or descriptions had specific emotional prompts, such as happy faces or tears. Next, the pictures were grouped based on the fact if the pictures showed images connected to the classroom, were abstract, or were connected to the real world. Pictures that were connected to the classroom displayed images such as books or teachers. Abstract images were images such as question marks. Real world connections, had images such as a bookstore or newspaper.

Additionally, a research assistant entered the same data and used the computer software QSR NVivo9 to create categories and codes. Finally, all three researchers met together to discuss the results. Two dominant themes emerged: negative experiences – often related to deadlines and the amount of work without proper time for deep thinking and processing, and a sense of accomplishment and pride associated with the internship and for accomplishing their coursework. The data analysis allowed us to develop the assertions described in the following section.

Results

Through the sketches and text written on the back, the pre-service teachers communicated their impressions of methods and its required internship. Eleven of the sixteen initial sketches were negative and five were neutral; there were no positive sketches or statements prior to the start of the course. The end of course sketches included 13 positive, one negative and two neutral emotions. (See Table 1.) The data analysis of the sketches and sentences, show that the pre-service teachers changed their expressed feelings and impressions about the methods course and its internship over the course of the semester.

Pre-Service Teachers' Initial Emotions		
Positive	Negative	Neutral
0	11	5
Pre-Service Teachers' Final Emotions		
Positive	Negative	Neutral
13	1	2

Table 1. Pre-Service Teachers Emotions Pre and Post Course

Pre Course Drawings

Out of 16 initial sketches, negative experiences constituted a majority (11) with zero positive experiences and five neutral experiences. Most of the negative sketches indicated that the feelings of stress, unhappiness and anxiety were related to the pre-service teachers thoughts about deadlines, assignments and workloads overwhelming them. (See Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4). For example, some drew themselves with computers, books and clocks. Having a lot of work to do seemed to be a common thought as the students visually displayed their feelings and frustrations.

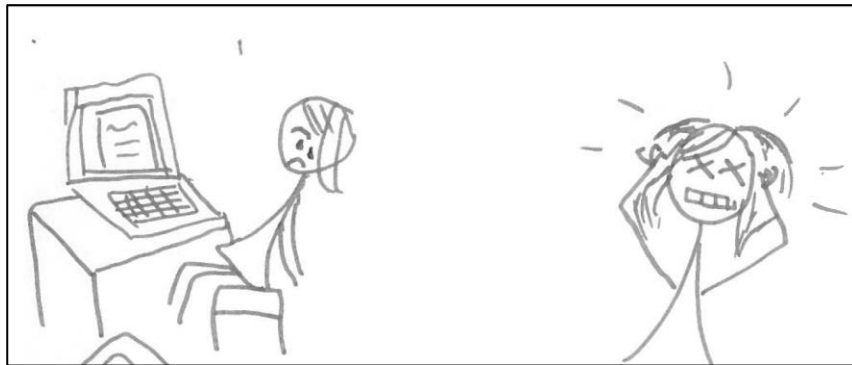


Figure 1. Negative Pre-Course Sketch

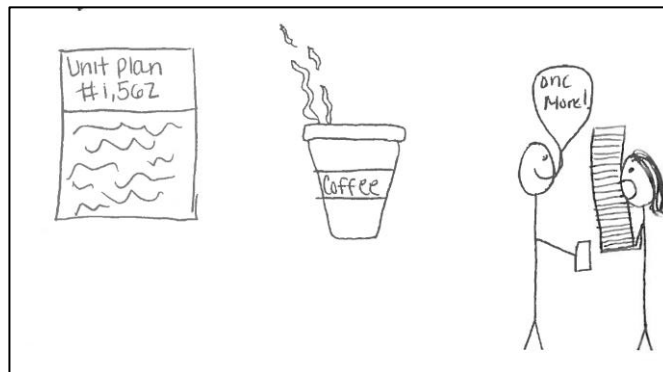


Figure 2. Negative Pre-Course Sketch

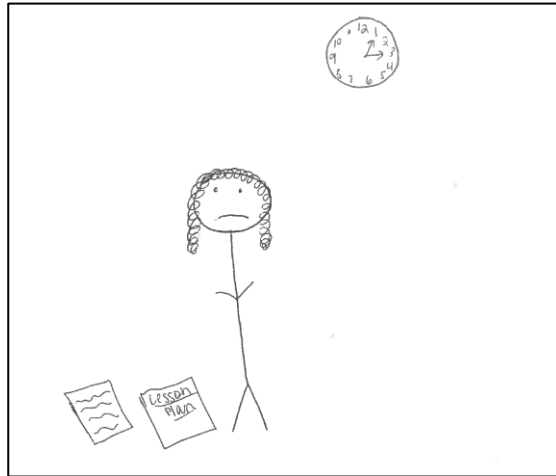


Figure 3. Negative Pre-Course Sketch

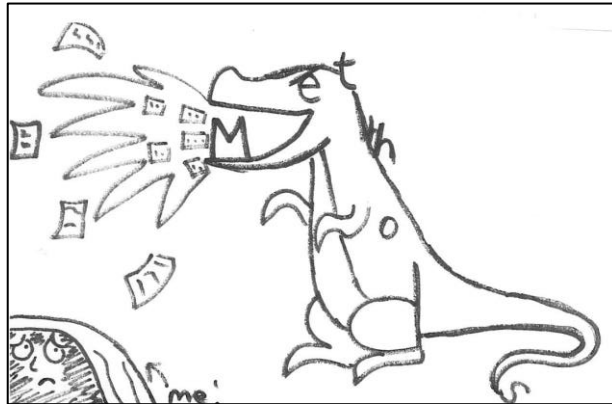


Figure 4. Negative Pre-Course Sketch

The text on the back of the pre course drawings supported the researchers' analysis that the students have feelings of stress and anxiety. One student wrote, *"When I think of methods, I think of having a very busy schedule and a lot of work throughout the whole semester."* Another wrote, *"I'm not a drawer, but that is a nervous student on the other side. I am scared of failure. I have heard horror stories about methods, and I am scared I won't make it."* And yet another confirmed the feelings of anxiety by writing, *"I am scared that we will have so much work that the stress will be too much."* A common thread for many of the negative sketches was the struggle students feel with the workload. Several wrote sentences expressing their worries about the feeling overwhelmed by all that they will have to do in the upcoming semester.

Post Course Drawings

The pre-service teachers came back together for their final face-to-face methods class session held on campus. Just like on the first day of the course, the pre-service teachers repeated the activity of sketching methods and adding some text on the back to explain their images.

A comparison of the emotions attached to the final sketches compared to the initial ones showed a positive growth in emotional affect. The majority of the positive sketches were of a sense of accomplishment and pride. While there were still negative and neutral emotions shared, overall they expressed a more positive perception of methods. Instead of eleven negative sketches, there was one. Instead of five neutral sketches, there were two. And while there had been zero positive sketches initially, thirteen of the sixteen final sketches were analyzed and classified as positive. Many of the final drawings illustrated a new perception that methods is a difficult journey, but that it is possible to succeed and to be better as a result. The analysis showed a sense of pride and accomplishment at the end of the methods course. (See Figures 5, 6, 7 and 8).

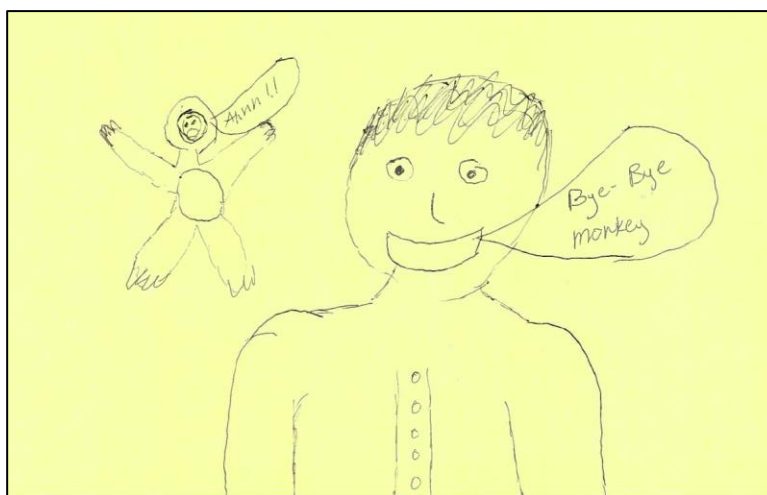


Figure 5. Positive Post-Course Sketch

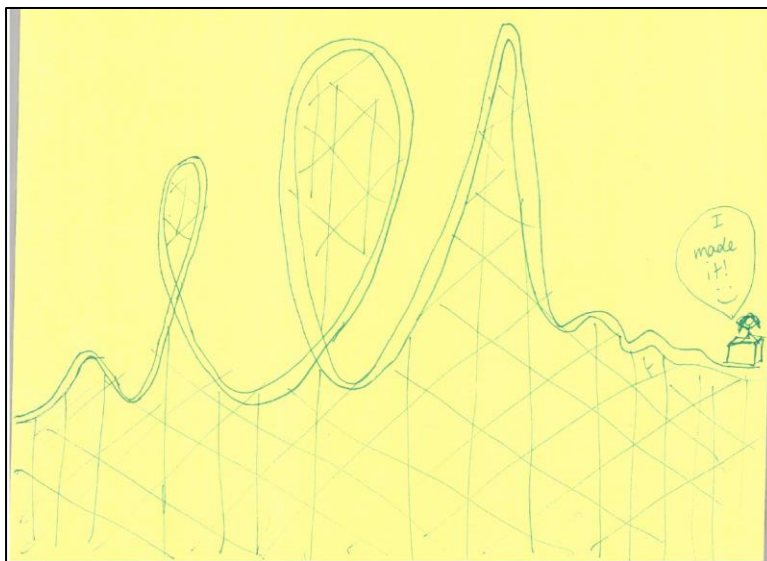


Figure 6. Positive Post-Course Sketch

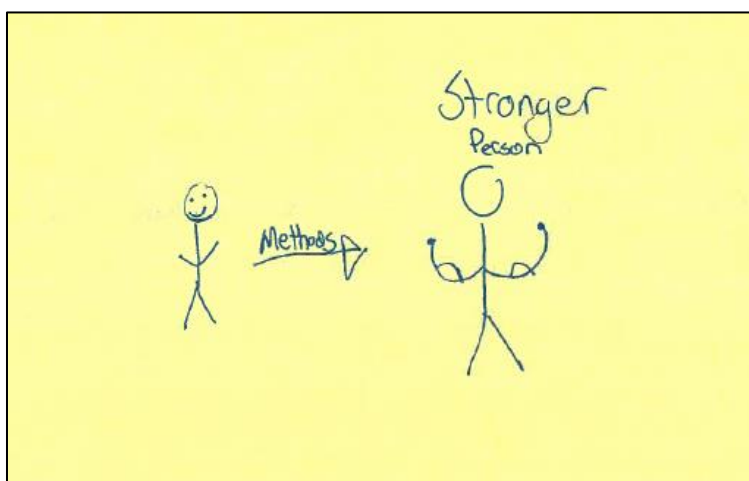


Figure 7. Positive Post-Course Sketch

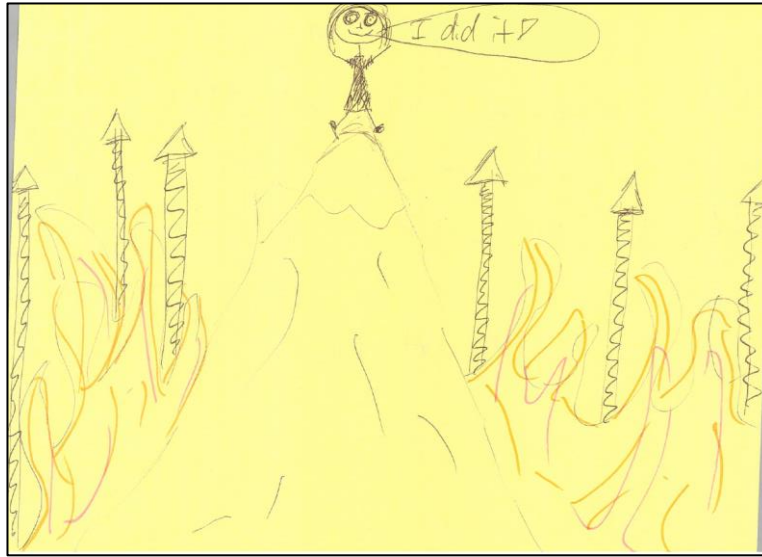


Figure 8. Positive Post-Course Sketch

The text on the back of the post course sketches backed up the researchers’ analysis that the students felt stress and anxiety during methods, but a sense of pride and accomplishment was gained as a result of the experience. A common theme of these post course sketches was that students felt a sense of relief when it ended.

One student wrote, *“I think that methods has been a positive experience because it has taught me time management skills and how to ask for help when I am overwhelmed.”* Another stated, *“Methods was not as bad as everyone said,”* and yet another wrote, *“It was not as stressful as everyone warned me about. Coming into methods I was terrified. I stayed organized and did not procrastinate. I’m glad I had this experience, even though at times I wanted to pull my hair out.”* Addressing the emotions of the experience and what helped, one pre-service teacher stated, *“I feel proud of what I have accomplished and all I have learned. It was challenging, but so worthwhile. What helped me was to keep my focus on my students. That helped me keep things in perspective and to stay motivated.”*

Limitations

There are several limitations across quasi-experimental or single group research designs including small samples sizes and reliance on self-reporting measures. Studies with small samples sizes could potentially result in errors. Self-reporting measures may include response bias. Bias refers to possible distortion of data collection due to the researcher’s own theory, values or preconceptions.

The researchers are aware of personal biases and the potential influence. This study is an interpretation of the participants' experience filtered through the views of three researchers.

In this qualitative research study, the collected and analyzed data gives a holistic portrait of the change in perceptions held by pre-service teachers because of their methods course and its related internship experience. The author makes no assertions about the findings being applicable to a larger population. Using detailed description, the author aims to bring the reader closer to the study.

Because conscious reflections on attitudes can alter negative complexes (Hillman, 1992), the attitudes may have been changed through the symbolic analysis, which was both a part of the methodology of this study as well as a conscious reflective process. This is one of the reasons that the images can be analyzed; however, assumptions about why they changed cannot be made. By having teacher candidates draw their perception of methods initially, they were most likely more aware of this throughout the methods course. Their emotions attached to the course may have become a more natural part of their thoughts. These pre-service teachers were challenged to draw their own perceptions of methods and in turn this may have made them more aware of those thoughts and emotions.

Discussion and Implications

By examining one's own perception of a subject, the artists are more cognizant of the emotions related to the concept. Watkins (1984) suggests that by investigating images and discussing feelings related to the images, the artists become empowered to engage actively in changing the negative perceptions related to the subject. Additionally, we as faculty members, now have a visual understanding of the anxiety involved our pre-service teachers' professional year. Interventions can be targeted to fit into the program and extra-curricular activities.

One interesting finding was the discovery that the negative experiences were often related to: deadlines and the amount of work assigned without proper time for deep thinking and processing. Currently, meetings are underway so that we can address these concerns and create interventions. Perhaps this will result in program changes or in the curriculum of the methods course. Additionally, we have decided to attempt to try to change the culture and environment by offering weekly sessions with no topic. These sessions will not be required, but will allow the students to come and share their thoughts, feeling and concerns in a safe environment, making us all more

receptive to student emotions so that our pre-service teachers have a better, more effective and productive professional year experience. When pre-service teachers associate their methods courses with their internship and experience success in their work, they view methods in a positive light and display enjoyment and a sense of accomplishment.

These findings contribute to research on insights held by pre-service teachers in their professional year. Several key findings provide awareness of pre-service teachers' perceptions and have implications for teacher education programs. This study provides evidence of negative feelings pre-service teachers bring to their professional year. The details in the images provide an understanding of the stress and anxiety experienced by most students prior to their professional year. It goes deeper than just recognizing negative emotions; it examines how these pre-service teachers view the concept of the methods experience. The details in the images provide visual understanding of stress and anxiety experienced by many. One interesting finding was the discovery that the negative experiences are often related to due dates and the amount of work rather than the actual assignments and projects. When pre-service teachers actually went through the methods course and its related internship, they viewed it in a positive light.

These pre-service teachers expressed a change in their beliefs as displayed in their sketches. Those who expressed methods in a positive light at the end of the semester often made references to children they were teaching in their internship. They made connections from their methods coursework to their field placements. By including the corresponding internship with the methods course work, students were able to blend both their on campus learning with the real world practical application – working in the context of a school's English language arts classroom.

Teacher educators should provide time for their pre-service teachers to reflect on the beliefs and perceptions they bring to the classroom. This reflection allows pre-service teachers to begin to explore how to create more meaningful experience for their own students. In addition, time for the pre-service teachers to make connections from their coursework to their schools should be an essential portion of the methods course. While this study offers insight into the perceptions that pre-service methods student hold, further studies are needed.

Conclusions

This study examined the symbolic images sketched by pre-service teachers at the beginning and at the end of a methods course and its related internship. The sketches were examined and sorted to explore the thoughts of the professional year that pre-service teachers brought to their methods course experience. Through the sketches and sentences, the pre-service teachers communicated their impressions of methods and its related internship, all requirements of their professional year. Eleven of the sixteen initial sketches were negative and five were neutral; there were no positive sketches or statements. Most initial negative drawings were about the pre-service teachers' feelings of stress and anxiety. The end of course sketches included 13 positive, one negative and two neutral. The majority of the positive sketches reflecting back about the whole semester were about having of a sense of accomplishment and pride.

Having pre-service teachers sketch their emotions can further understanding about what thoughts students bring to their courses and internships. These understandings can give insight into helping support pre-service teachers as they grow and develop throughout their professional year. This is critical to increase the pre-service teachers' achievement, satisfaction and emotional well-being.

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