

## THE INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING EXPERIENCES OF BEGINNING TEACHERS

**Anna L. Ball, Assistant Professor**  
University of Florida  
**Neil A. Knobloch, Assistant Professor**  
University of Illinois  
**Sue Hoop, Agriculture Teacher**  
Barnesville High School, Ohio

### Abstract

*The purpose of this collective case study was to understand the nature of planning and the influences on planning among intern and novice teachers in Illinois. Sixteen intern teachers and 15 novice teachers participated in reflections, focus group interviews, and individual interviews. In regard to the nature of planning, both intern and novice teachers planned as a mental process, conceptualized and prioritized content, and utilized a daily or hourly planning approach. Interns differed from novices in the use of adaptation of lesson planning approaches. In regard to influences on planning, both interns and novices noted knowledge and experience, schedules, school administrators, facilities, technology, and resources, students, personality, and impracticality of planning methods. Further, intern teachers and novice teachers had unique influences on planning based upon their differing contexts, expectations, and teaching experiences.*

### Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Despite the best efforts of teacher preparation programs, learning to teach is as often guided by craft knowledge and policy constraints as it is by a sound knowledge base in the practice of teaching (Shulman, 1987). It has been theorized that teachers derive their knowledge about teaching from four sources including: (1) content knowledge, (2) knowledge of the materials and settings of the institution, (3) knowledge of the school and nature and purposes of schooling, and (4) the wisdom or knowledge of practice itself. This wisdom of practice is the least codified aspect of the knowledge base for teachers (Schön, 1983; Schulman). Yet, research regarding the widening gap between theories espoused in teacher education programs and the real-world practice of teachers indicates that teacher education should be better informed by such wisdom of practice. Therefore, the practice of teaching could be transformed from a craft to a science by examining the pedagogical

reasoning of both experienced and inexperienced teachers to codify the wisdom of practice into a scientific knowledge base in teacher education.

The study of the wisdom of teacher practice is embedded in the notion that teachers are reflective practitioners, making professional judgments and decisions regarding practice (Schön, 1983). As such, the conceptual framework for this study is informed by Clark and Peterson's (1986) model of teacher thought and action (Figure 1). This model represents a bidirectional relationship between teachers' *thought processes* and their *actions* and their observable effects as they are influenced or shaped by the constraints and opportunities within the *context* of teaching.

Within this model, the constraints and opportunities within the context of teaching directly influence what teachers think and how they act. This model was specifically adapted to indicate the constraints and opportunities as they related to the action of teacher planning. Teacher thought

processes include: teacher planning (thinking prior to and after teaching), teachers' interactive thoughts and decisions (decisions that teachers make while teaching), and teacher's theories and beliefs. Finally, teacher actions and their

observable effects include: students' classroom behavior, student achievement and outcomes, and teachers' classroom behavior, and specifically the outcomes and nature of teachers' lesson plans.

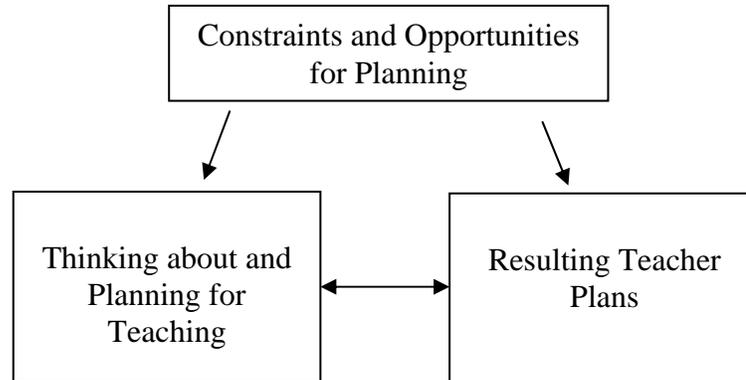


Figure 1. Adapted model of teacher thought and action of instructional planning (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p. 257).

As indicated in this model, what teachers think and believe and what teachers do interacts in a bidirectional relationship. Therefore, this study was conceptualized to seek understanding specifically regarding what teachers think about planning and the ways in which they actually plan or engage in the planning process. As such, literature regarding the thought processes of how teachers planned and the influences that shaped their planning practices served as the theoretical framework of the study.

Teacher planning, as a critical component of the pedagogical reasoning of teachers has been denoted in the research base in one of two ways: (1) the set of psychological processes in which a person visualizes the future, inventories means and ends, and constructs a framework to guide his or her action or (2) the “things that teachers do when they say that they are planning” (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p. 260). Instructional planning is essential to teaching because it is the process by which teachers link curriculum to learning (Clark & Yinger, 1987).

Lesson plans are concrete representations of the day's events that guide teacher-student interactions and instructional outcomes. Effective teaching usually springs from a well-planned, well-organized, and well-presented lesson plan

(Wood & Miederhoff, 1988). According to Hoover and Hollingsworth (1975), a good lesson plan has many educational benefits: (a) it provides teacher guidelines, (b) allows time for the teacher to motivate students and to prepare for individual differences, and (c) allows teachers to evaluate their activities and improve their teaching skills. Even though it is widely believed that instructional planning skills are critical for instructional effectiveness in the classroom (Clark & Dunn, 1991), there is no strong evidence that teachers actually use these processes (Martin, 1990; Young, Reisner, & Dick, 1998). Teachers typically do not follow the planning procedures acquired in their teacher education programs (Clark & Yinger, 1980; Kagan & Tippins, 1992; Morine-Dershimer & Vallance, 1976; Peterson, Marx, & Clark, 1978; Reynolds, 1993; Zahorik, 1975).

The most widely espoused method of planning in teacher education programs is the Tylerian, objectives-based model. Within this linear model, intern teachers are taught to begin the planning process by first listing learner objectives, by planning content and activities appropriate to the objectives, and by constructing assessments informed by the objectives. Yet, research regarding the ways in which teachers actually plan indicates that planning is a

continual, nested process, which is contrary to the traditional Tylerian model of being discrete and linear (Eggen & Kauchak, 2003).

Research on teachers' thought processes indicates that teachers tend to think about content and instructional strategies before objectives when they planned for classes (Peterson et al., 1978; Morine-Dersheimer & Vallance, 1976). Teachers spend more time thinking about the student needs and interests, available resources, and other aspects of the instructional context rather than objectives and assessment. Factors such as teacher experience (Sardo, 1982), the age of the learners (Berk, 1997), students' interests and experiences (Eggen & Kauchak, 2001), the nature of the content (Eggen & Kauchak, 2003), administrator demands (McCutcheon, 1980), materials and resources (Blumenfeld, Hicks, & Krajcik, 1996), and time (White & Williams, 1996) all influence teacher planning. Further, teacher planning tends to be a very individualized process, teachers practice many different approaches to planning, and plans tend to reflect the teacher's personality and instructional style (Wilén, Ishler, Hutchinson, & Kindsvatter, 2000).

On average, teachers spend about 12 hours a week engaged in instructional planning. They begin the planning process with a general idea and then move through planning phases of continual modification and elaboration. Further, written plans reflected a small proportion of the whole lesson and most of the plan remains in the minds of the teacher (Clark & Yinger, 1980). While many teachers do not write out detailed lesson plans, and inexperienced teachers are less likely to see the benefits of detailed lesson plans (Wilén et al., 2000), sound planning has been attributed to good teaching (Wilén et al.). Research indicates that teachers who had daily lesson plans had higher student achievement (Brophy & Good, 1986).

Since the 1970's, many studies and reviews have concentrated on the processes of planning (Bellon, Bellon, & Blank, 1992; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Sanchez & Valcarcel, 1999). Yet, there is a paucity of the research in agricultural education regarding the ways in which intern and

novice agriculture teachers plan. Planning is a key component of the wisdom of teacher practice. A more codified knowledge base regarding this wisdom of practice through studying the planning practices of novice teachers in agricultural education could serve to inform teacher educators about the ways in which teachers plan (thought processes and actions) and the influences on teacher planning (contextual constraints and opportunities), in order to decrease the widening gap between theory and practice in their teacher education programs.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the planning experiences of intern teachers and novice teachers in agricultural education. The research questions of the study were: (a) How did intern teachers and novice teachers plan? (b) What influenced intern teachers' and novice teachers' planning?

### **Methods and Procedures**

This study was a collective case study of 16 intern and 15 novice teachers in Illinois. The interns consisted of an accessible sample of students enrolled in a 12-week student teaching internship and a 4-week professional development seminar in the spring semester of 2003. Eight of the interns were male and the remaining eight were female. For novice teachers, the purposive sample was an accessible group of first and second year teachers enrolled in a graduate course for beginning teachers for the 2002-2003 academic year. Of the 15 participants, five were female and ten were male. Three teachers were in their second year of teaching, and the remaining 12 were first year teachers.

The intern teachers participated in a one-hour focus group interview and completed an open-ended reflection within two to three weeks after completing their 12-week student teaching internships in the spring semester of 2003. The novice teachers reflected in two, on campus focus group discussions which consisted of large group processing, and small group reflective activities. Further, focus groups were

conducted at each of three area meetings that were geographically distributed throughout the state. Teachers were visited for an hour one-to-one interview at their respective schools. Finally, teachers were asked to respond to a reflective writing assignment related to teaching.

The researchers were informed by an interpretivist epistemology and served as the instruments for the study. All focus group transcriptions, one-to-one interviews transcriptions, and teacher reflections were coded for emerging themes based on the research questions. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were established through the use of peer debriefing, transcriptions of interviews, direct quotes, triangulation, description of the participants, thick description, process trail, audit trail, and content trail (Donmoyer, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All interview and reflection questions were constructed from a review of the literature and were evaluated by a panel of experts for credibility. Although the researchers attempted to collect, analyze, and interpret the evidence objectively, there is no certainty that some of the findings were not influenced by the researchers' biases (Fontana & Frey, 2000). The findings from this study should not be generalized beyond the sample. This study was limited because the intern teachers were from one of the four university teacher preparation programs and represented half of the student teaching interns in the state.

### Results/Findings

The first research question was to understand the ways in which intern and novice teachers planned. On average, intern and novice teachers spent 10 hours per week planning. Interns had a range of one to 40 hours. Novice teachers planned for a range of one to 18 hours. Three planning themes emerged that were *common* to both novice and intern teachers, and one theme unique to

the intern teachers emerged and are reported as follows.

#### *Instructional Planning Themes for Intern and Novice Teachers*

In regard to the ways in which intern and novice teachers planned, the following three themes emerged as common themes between both groups, including planning as a mental process, the prioritization and conceptualization of content, and planning on a daily or hourly basis (Table 1).

##### *Mental Process*

Both intern and novice teachers discussed their lesson planning as a mental process, involving thinking about what they wanted to accomplish versus writing formal lesson plans. Many intern and novice teachers commented that they did not need a detailed lesson plan and that doing so was a waste of time.

##### *Prioritizing and Conceptualizing Content*

Intern and novice teachers noted the need to either learn or re-conceptualize content in order to decide what was important to teach. The abundance of Internet, state curriculum resources, and even National FFA Organization resources in the absence of a standardized curriculum created the need for both intern and novice teachers to prioritize content.

##### *Daily or Hourly Planning*

Although novice and intern teachers manifested the notion of "just in time" planning in different ways, this theme remained constant for both groups. Some interns used a daily approach to planning. Novice teachers were more forthcoming in regard to the fact that they utilized a daily or even hourly approach to planning by indicating that they utilized movies, worksheets, or informal activities as a "just in time" plan.

Table 1  
*Similarities in the Nature of Planning Between Intern and Novice Teachers*

Planning Theme	Intern Teachers	Novice Teachers
Mental Process	“To me as much as anything was going through the process and thinking about it while you were writing it down was good and enough to engrain it in your brain.”	“It might not be necessarily writing out what I’m going to do, but thinking about it, which is the great thing about working on the farm ‘cause you’re always busy, but you’ve got time to think about things too.”
Prioritizing and Conceptualizing Content	“I started by looking for content. Often this came from the [state curriculum resources]. I then conceptualized what I felt was most important and filled in any gaps that I thought existed...”	“I’ve used my notes from those classes and combined them for my teaching materials so I’m putting back into notes the stuff that I’d taken as notes as a student and teaching that to my kids.”
Daily/Hourly Planning	“... I think about what we did today, and where we should move on to tomorrow...”	“...right now, I kind of go day to day. It bugs me to do that though.”

#### *Instructional Planning Themes Unique to Intern Teachers*

While the nature of planning as a mental process, the need to prioritize content, and the necessity of “just in time” planning were common to intern and novice teachers, one unique theme in regard to planning emerged among the interns. This theme was labeled coping strategies and adaptations for planning.

#### *Coping and Adaptations for Planning*

Some interns describe a developmental process of starting their internship by creating lesson plans similar to the way they were taught in the teaching methods class. After about two weeks, the interns expressed that they adapted their plans to a more informal process that typically resulted in outlines or instructional resources. One intern shared, “Initially, I used lesson plans, but then I did content plans.” It appeared that interns adjusted the ways in which they planned because they did not have the time to develop written, detailed lesson plans.

The second research question focused on the particular influences on planning for both intern and novice teachers. For this question, seven common themes and four unique themes emerged that were reported as follows.

#### *Instructional Planning Influences Common to Intern and Novice Teachers*

The following themes emerged as common influences on planning for both intern and novice teachers including, knowledge and experience, schedules, school administrators, facilities, technology, and resources, students, personality, and impracticality of planning methods (Table 2).

#### *Knowledge and Experience*

Interns and novices expressed that having little knowledge in a content area and/or teaching experience involved more daily planning. Teachers planned lessons in terms of their own knowledge and comfort levels with the subject matter at hand.

#### *Schedules*

Intern and novice teachers planned according to schedules and calendars. Both the school’s daily schedule, the time of year, and the calendar of local, state, or National FFA Organization activities influenced the way in which and what teachers planned. In addition, school routines as well as the routines within a particular class in terms of expectations and tasks to be conducted influenced the planning process.

Table 2  
*Similarities in the Influences on Planning Between Intern and Novice Teachers*

Planning Theme	Intern Teachers	Novice Teachers
Knowledge & Experience	“...some of us have had more experience than other people. Some of these people do not feel as comfortable...Now me, I’m used to going on the fly.”	“I go through the approved list of state courses and use that stuff as a guide....but right now, I’m teaching what I know...”
Schedules	“I know I would have been [more organized] in a block schedule. I would have been putting more time in my planning...”	“...you’re going to see what we’re going to cover today and who’s getting to water the plants today, and do different jobs and then that way it saves me time...”
School Administrators	“It’s good when you are giving it [lesson plan] to a supervisor.”	“...what our principal wants is...a template where you need to write down the class activities.”
Facilities, Technology, and Resources	“I just didn’t realize the technology was going to be there.”	“So everything was on PowerPoint and it was so nice...”
Students	“I tried to set units up and was like, ‘we need to do this and this and this,’ but obviously you couldn’t do a unit if they [students] didn’t know anything about it.”	“I pretty much let the students decide what we want to do and then I will get the material ready for it.”
Personality	“I think that it is personality thing, like everything I do in my life, I plan, so I would need a plan...some people can do really well without one.”	“If you procrastinate something in that classroom you have twenty people critiquing you. They’re going to know if you mess up.”
Impracticality of Planning Methods	“Yeah, if I used that form that we were taught to use, I kind of spend a lot of time with my head down trying to figure out what question I was going to be asking at 10 minutes and it’s ridiculous.”	“I don’t even do those anymore, please, you don’t have time to do that. Oh my g[osh].”

*School Administrators*

A few intern and novice teachers said that their principals required them to turn in lesson plans. Teachers noted the value in doing lesson plans for academic accountability to the school administration. Lesson plans were formatted according to administrator requirements.

*Facilities, Technology, & Resources*

A few interns and novices commented how the absence or presence of facilities, technology, and resources influenced their

planning. Intern and novice teachers adapted their lesson plans to be technology based because they did not realize the technology would be available in the classroom.

*Student*

Intern and novice teachers both indicated student interests, prior knowledge, and experiences as guides to their instructional planning. Planning was influenced by what students wanted to learn in particular courses, to maintain positive classroom interactions.

### *Personality*

Some interns and novices thought that their personalities influenced how they planned. Some felt the need to be more organized and systematic in their planning while others felt that lesson plans restricted their personal teaching styles and flexibility in the classroom.

### *Impracticality of Planning Methods*

Interns and novices both mentioned that they did not plan how they were taught in the teaching methods course. Further, some interns mocked the way they had been taught how to plan because they did not see them practical. Novice teachers discussed the differences in how they were taught to plan as preservice teachers and how they planned as practitioners.

### *Divergent Instructional Planning Themes for Intern and Novice Teachers*

While common themes emerged in regard to influences on planning between intern and novice teachers, four divergent themes emerged among the two groups of teachers. Intern teachers indicated the teaching methods course, university supervisors, and cooperating teachers as influencing their planning whereas planning for a substitute teacher was an influencing factor unique to novice teachers.

### *Teaching Methods Course*

The interns mentioned that they adapted the way they were taught in the teaching methods course to work for them. The teaching methods course gave the interns the mechanics to think about the teaching behind the lesson plan, "The lesson plans in [the teaching methods] class were good for organizational planning but we were in an ideal setting."

### *University Supervisors and Cooperating Teachers*

Some interns mentioned their university teacher helped them clarify their planning or felt accountable to have plans because of them. One intern said, "I made them because I thought we had to turn them in at the end of the semester." Cooperating teachers also had various influences on the intern teachers' planning experiences. Some

cooperating teachers were supportive and expected their interns to have lesson plans. For example, "My cooperating teacher was very impressed with the outline that I presented to him." Other cooperating teachers undermined what the university teacher preparation program taught the interns, communicated negative messages, encouraged the interns to do whatever they wanted to do, had no discussions about planning or had informal discussions or glances at the intern's plans. One intern commented,

He [cooperating teacher] discouraged me from doing lesson plans and he discouraged me from doing unit calendars because he said, 'it is a waste of your time. You are never going to stick to it, so don't bother.' And so I didn't.

### *Planning for a Substitute*

Novice teachers discussed that how and what they planned, and even their planning style looked very different based upon whether they or a substitute was teaching the lesson. "I'm planning for subs, if I don't have enough for them to do while I'm here, I can make up something for them to do, but if a sub's here they're clueless on what I have been doing." Lesson plans or even lesson topics that a teacher would consider acceptable in a class were not what they would allow a substitute to teach.

## **Conclusions/Implications/Recommendations**

In regard to the nature of planning among novice and intern teachers, it was concluded that there were many similarities in the ways in which both groups of teachers planned. Interns and novices both spend nearly the same amount of time on instructional planning at 10 hours per week, which is consistent with previous literature indicating an average of 12 hours per week spent on instructional planning for teachers overall (Clark & Yinger, 1980). Further, novices and intern teachers as consistent with previous literature, spend more time thinking about planning versus writing formal lesson plans (Clark & Yinger, 1980;

Willen et al., 2000). This implies that novices and interns are more focused on the internal process of lesson planning rather than the external process of writing a formal lesson plan. Teacher educators should instruct lesson planning techniques that consider the nature of this inherent process and the ways in which beginning teachers adapt the ways in which they were taught in teacher education courses to their unique contexts in the real world of teaching. Further studies should incorporate think-aloud protocols to study the internal thought processes that novice teachers employ while planning for instruction.

It was further concluded that while there appeared to be a gap in how teachers indicated that they were instructed to plan in their university teaching methods courses and how they actually planned, both novices and interns planned for lessons through similar thought processes. Novices and interns first internalized the content or learned the material and prioritized important information themselves; they then planned in ways that connected the content to students; and finally their plans operationalized the content, or adapted content to the nature of the context in which they were teaching including considering the student needs, nature of schedules, technology and facilities, and external demands on the planning process. The implication of this finding is that the planning of novice teachers might not occur in the traditional, Tylerian-based system of planning objectives, instruction, and then assessment. Further, intern and novice teachers practiced planning on a daily or hourly basis. The nature of this “just in time” method of planning for beginning agriculture teachers implies that it could be easier for novice teachers to teach to a schedule that demands tasks that need to be done immediately and can be taught based on content rules rather than trying to conceptualize content for five to six different classes simultaneously. It is recommended that further studies be conducted that develop a greater understanding of the pedagogical content knowledge and planning strategies specific to the practice of teaching high school agriculture as well as ways in which

teachers plan to teach the knowledge base.

The planning processes of intern and novice teachers were influenced by personal and contextual factors as consistent with Clark and Peterson’s (1986) model for teacher thinking. The specific planning influences for intern and novice teachers were different because the contexts were different. For example, the constraints and opportunities of completing a student teaching internship for intern teachers versus managing one’s agricultural education program for novice teachers created unique contextual influences on planning for both groups. Intern teachers were influenced by and planned for teaching in the context of developing themselves as teachers versus novices who planned in the context of developing their programs. Further, interns were concerned about student learning or outcomes of the lesson while novices were concerned about their own competence in learning the material, the students, and the system on a daily basis. The implication of this finding is that regardless of the authenticity of the student teaching internship, teachers will face and be influenced by different contexts and thus different constraints and opportunities with different teaching experiences. It is recommended that this study and other lines of inquiry be replicated with expert agriculture teachers to investigate the wisdom of expert practice, and explore the novice-expert continuum. As such, researchers in agricultural education should conduct future studies that develop a more codified knowledge base for teaching high school agriculture and instruct preservice teachers on planning methods more specific to the context of that knowledge base.

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ANNA L. BALL is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication at the University of Florida, 305-C Rolfs Hall, P.O. Box 110540, Gainesville, FL 32611. E-mail: [alball@ufl.edu](mailto:alball@ufl.edu).

NEIL A. KNOBLOCH is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Human and Community Development at the University of Illinois, 139 Bevier Hall, MC-180, Urbana, IL 61801. E-mail: [nknobloc@uiuc.edu](mailto:nknobloc@uiuc.edu).

SUE HOOP is an Agriculture Teacher at Barnesville High School, 910 Shamrock Drive, Barnesville, OH 43713. E-mail: [suehoop@uiuc.edu](mailto:suehoop@uiuc.edu).