identifying good
student teaching placements:
A programmatic perspective

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"Practice what you preach" is an old adage in our society and, as with most old adages, the essence of its message may be worthy of our attention. What it asks of us is consistency—that there be a connection between what we say and what we do. And why is that? For one thing, it points to the power of modeling; if you really want your idea to get across, you need to demonstrate it as well as explain it. The phrase also suggests that if you feel something is necessary for others, it ought to be necessary for yourself. For all these reasons, and more, it is a message we take seriously in the Mills College Credential Program. We aim for consistency; we believe in the power of what we call, "principled practice." We have conscientiously constructed a set of principles, which we think ought to inform the future teaching of our credential candidates if they are to work toward the goals of equity and social justice. In order to better ensure that happens, we use those same principles to guide our own practice. We want all aspects of our program—our structure, our courses, our assignments, our interactions, and our fieldwork—to be consistent with these principles. In recent years we have begun to question whether the student teaching portion of the program is as supportive of our efforts as we would like it to be. We had always been aware that some of our placements were "better" than others, but we had hoped that our students could learn our
principles, with our help, in any classroom context. We realized we needed to take a more systematic look.

To take this look we designed a study that is reported in the following pages. We decided to use case studies as our research design because we wanted to get an in-depth look at what the student teaching experience was like for our candidates. We selected two students for participation—one from the secondary program, Jessica, and one from the elementary, Sheila, so that we could consider grade level placement as a variable if it seemed to emerge as significant. Both had exceptional backgrounds that we felt prepared them well for the master’s program. We chose both of these student teachers not because they were typical but because their cases offered us a good opportunity to understand the phenomenon under consideration in this study. Each of these student teachers had what seemed to be a strong placement and a weak placement so that we could look at how those differences affected the same individuals. This initial distinction was very loosely made on the basis of student teacher and supervisor reactions to the placement—on whether or not they considered it to be a generally positive and productive learning experience. A central purpose of our study was to determine if that categorization was accurate and, if so, how these definitions might be refined and understood.

One of the participants, Jessica, had the weak placement first, whereas Sheila had the strong placement first. We hoped to see whether the order mattered—was it better, worse, or inconsequential to have a weak placement before or after a strong placement? Both were identified by their supervisors as individuals whose entries in their professional journals were substantive and insightful. In addition, each was considered to exhibit considerable strength in the classroom. This was important both because it would give us access to more data, and because we wanted to see whether and how problematic placements affected our more reflective and well-prepared student teachers. If they had difficulties, we might assume that others would be even more susceptible. In other words, we selected for study two very capable student teachers first because we needed individuals who could give us access to their thinking. All student teachers process what they are learning, but not all can share it well with others. Second, most student teachers do not have the backgrounds or initial strengths that these two did. With others it might be easier to suggest that any fieldwork problems that occurred were due to their own inadequacies. If we examined the struggles of our most capable students, we should be better able to determine what about the context and structure of the student teaching experience might need changing and in what ways. Thus, what we found could be helpful in the designing of all fieldwork experiences for all types of student teachers in all kinds of programs.

We also gathered data from the Mills faculty and supervisors. We gave them a questionnaire asking them to share their views on student teaching—what it was for, what it might look like in the ideal, and what their reactions to our current circumstances were. We wanted to get a sense for how we were all conceptualizing
fieldwork and compare that to what was actually happening for our student teachers in the field.

The Mills Context

In order to understand the experiences of Jessica and Sheila, one needs to know something about their context. The Mills College Credential Program, entitled Teachers for Tomorrow's Schools, is a two-year graduate program that results in a multiple subject or single subject teaching credential and a master's degree in education. The credential and half of the master's degree are completed during the first academic year. In that year credential candidates student teach in the mornings, beginning the first day of school and ending the last. Additionally, they take courses at the college in the afternoons. Each student teacher has two different placements—one in the fall and one in the spring. They have a supervisor from the college who works with them and their cooperating teachers in those assignments. The student teachers interact with and receive support from their supervisors in a variety of ways: they meet weekly with them and all others in their program group at a student teaching seminar; they are observed by them every other week; they keep a professional journal wherein they reflect on their practice which is responded to by the supervisor; and they have numerous other formal and informal interactions.

Program Principles

Guided by the overarching goals of equity and social justice, the program, as we have mentioned, is organized around a set of principles that are reflected in the coursework, fieldwork, assignments, and general culture of the Mills Education community. They are:

TEACHING IS INHERENTLY MORAL WORK that must be guided by an ethic of care.

TEACHING IS REFLECTIVE WORK that requires active and systematic inquiry for learning throughout the teacher's career.

LEARNING IS DEVELOPMENTAL AND CONSTRUCTIVIST and thus teaching is best guided by those conceptions of how learners come to know.

TEACHING IS CONNECTED IN DEEP AND IMPORTANT WAYS TO SUBJECT MATTER. A central goal of the work is to prepare students to acquire, understand, and construct subject matter knowledge.

TEACHING IS COLLEGIAL in that both teachers and students learn in the context of relationships that matter. Colleagues and community are central.

TEACHING IS INHERENTLY POLITICAL in that by definition, it is concerned with matters of change that are neither neutral nor inconsequential.
As a starting point for our study we surveyed the faculty and supervisors to ascertain their view of the ideal student teaching placement. Not surprisingly given our size and the amount of time we spend working together on program elements and plans, there was considerable agreement among the group about what might be ideal for learning conditions in the field. First on the list was that the teacher's teaching philosophy be consistent with the principles that guide the Mills Program. We felt that the more consistency there was between the cooperating teacher's views and practices, the better it would be as a learning context for our students. In a similar vein, it would be ideal if the student teacher could see modeled in the teaching of the cooperating teacher, the principles around which our program is designed. A second and related condition concerned the student teacher/cooperating teacher relationship. Given the challenge of learning to teach in someone else's classroom, and our belief that people learn by having experiences and then having the opportunity to reflect on those experiences in part by discussing them with others, we agreed that the relationship needed to be safe, supportive and conducive to that reflective conversation. Ideally, the student teacher would be able to talk freely with his/her cooperating teacher, share ideas and struggles, and learn together through a collaborative conversation about practice.

With those ideas in mind, we defined a series of four steps we hoped our student teachers would be able to take as part of their learning work in the field. In the ideal, the student teaching placement would provide our students a place where they could have multiple opportunities to: (1) recognize the principles in action (or notice when they were not enacted); (2) reflect on the circumstances that led to the enactment or lack of enactment of the principles; (3) enact the principles in their own practice (either literal or imagined); and (4) embrace the principles as one of many paradigms that will guide future teaching. We used these four steps as a coding scheme when we analyzed the student journals that were the basis for the cases that follow. We analyzed each journal entry to determine which, if any, of the steps that we thought would promote learning were present in the journal reflections. Our assessment of these settings as learning contexts for student teachers is based on our analysis of the student teachers' journals rather than any independent review on our parts. It is our contention that though there was evidence of the Mills' principles in the teaching that went on in both sets of classrooms for both students, the enactment of those principles made the learning opportunities for Jessica and Sheila different in each. In this article we explore how this was so, and why.
Case One: Jessica

Jessica was a student in our Teachers for Tomorrow’s Schools Secondary English and Social Studies Program. She brought to the experience solid subject matter preparation which she garnered through study as an undergraduate English major and her M.A. in English literature. Before entering teaching, Jessica spent several years in industry though even during this time she claims she never lost her early love for school, and her secret desire to become a teacher. She said in her application essay to the Mills credential program: “I have wanted to be a teacher since I was in Georgia Grovner’s third grade class at Lockert Elementary School in Pleasanton, California.” Ms. Grovner, who recognized her for the unique person she is, helped Jessica see her academic skills as “something to be celebrated,” rather than a “burden that separated (her) from her classmates.” For this important reason, Ms. Grovner was, and probably still is, Jessica’s model of a good teacher. Jessica writes:

It has been my goal since then to become like her, and to do for my students what she did for me—to give them the confidence to realize their own talents and the tools to develop them.

Jessica followed in her mentor’s footsteps immediately even as a teaching assistant in graduate school. Her supervisor at the time described her as a “rigorous” teacher and an “empathetic” one as well. Her caring approach to her teaching was guided by a “commitment to multicultural education and to finding strategies to empower students of different ethnicities and class backgrounds.” Her “skills in literary studies” as well as her “solid background in literature” prepared her well. Her subject matter preparation as well as her “intellect, professionalism, and commitment to social justice” made her “exactly the kind of individual who should be encouraged to take up secondary school teaching.” It was clear that when Jessica entered the Mills credential program in the fall of 1998 she brought with her a solid foundation already in place for embracing the principles that would guide her study and process of learning to teach. The data that are reported below come from her student teaching journal from the 1998-1999 school year.

Jessica’s Student Teaching Placements

As is true for almost all of her secondary credential colleagues at Mills, Jessica spent her two semesters of student teaching at two different institutions. The differences between these settings provide a good opportunity to compare and examine the role of the fieldwork context in the process of learning to teach. Her first semester placement was in a junior “honors” English classroom at a comprehensive high school near Mills. She explained in her journal that the class she taught was heterogeneous in terms of skill level even though by definition it was considered an “honors” group since “(h)onors at American High is self-selected.” Contributing to the feeling of heterogeneity was the diverse student population at
American High which serves families of a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Most of American High’s students are working and middle class.

Jessica’s cooperating teacher, Randy, was a Mills graduate with seven years of teaching experience. She was chair of her department, and the fact that she taught the honors classes was an indicator of her high status. It was clear to us in our placing Jessica with her that the two had much in common. Both had MA's in English, and both were writers. We thought the placement for Jessica was perfect.

Second semester, Jessica moved to a middle school “core” position teaching a combined language arts and social studies curriculum at Milford Middle School. Though in a more urban setting than American High, the distinctions between institutions regarding their urban/suburban status are fairly arbitrary; all of the public schools in the Oakland metropolitan area have very diverse student populations. At Milford the percentage of African American students is higher than at American High where the diversity is mostly Latino and South East Asian. Like the American High families, those at Milford are mostly working or middle class.

Dory, Jessica’s Milford cooperating teacher, has also been teaching seven years though this is only her third at Milford. A cooperating teacher for Mills for all three of those years, Dory is well known in our community for teaching that reflects her commitment to social justice. Jessica explained in her journal that in Dory’s classroom “every assignment and every unit is to enhance the students’ ability to independently evaluate information, think critically, and reach sound conclusions.” She wants “each student to feel welcome and safe” so that all can participate equally in the academic program that is organized to teach students “the skills and ideas they need to be historians and literary critics.” Jessica was captivated by Dory’s commitment to rigorous subject matter folded under the umbrella of social justice. Like Randy the semester before, Dory “cares deeply about her students.” We thought that we had made another perfect match.

How teachers enact the ethic of care is a useful entry point for considering classrooms as learning contexts for student teachers. From Jessica’s case, we are reminded that the ethic of care can result in very different classroom actions. Though Dory and Randy shared with Jessica a deep caring commitment to the success of their students, their interpretations of this belief as a guide for action were very different and showed in their responses to the Mills’ principles and in their answers to the questions that frame them: How do people learn? What do students need to know? What is school for?

Early in the semester, Randy described her American High students to Jessica as “militantly ignorant.” She judged them to be generally unmotivated and this appellation extended to a lesser extent to her honors students. Believing that they had neither the time nor the will to construct their own knowledge using the techniques she learned in her teacher preparation program at Mills, she chose a direct instruction approach for her teaching. Randy seemed to believe that to “teach with care” was to provide students with what she knows about particular pieces of literature and about
writing, and to make certain they come to know that information. In contrast, Dory’s interpretation of “care” was to direct a classroom where students construct their own knowledge rather than acquire the “expert” knowledge of the teacher.

Semester One

An examination of the data from Jessica’s first semester journal provides a window to her early efforts to accomplish the four goals described above: recognition of the principle, reflection on it, opportunity to enact it (or imagine enacting it), and the beginnings of an embrace of the principle. From the start, Jessica recognized that Randy employed a very “directive” approach with her students. Though this appeared different from what she was learning in her course work at Mills, Jessica was open to learning from Randy and eager to understand her approach. She wrote in her journal in early September:

She is very directive, which is good now, because it’s the second day of school and they really don’t know what it means for them to be in Junior Honors English, studying American Literature. She is asking them to think very hard about very complex notions which adults haven’t worked out over centuries of thought, such as the American Dream and the dilemma of individual vs. communal identity. So I guess it is only fair to guide them to these discussions, to give them some way in by asking specific questions.

As she reflected more, she raised new questions: “Yet I wonder how teachers, in composing thoughtful, provocative questions, keep from crossing the line between guiding a student into deeper thought or leading her to a conclusion not necessarily her own.” She wondered whether Randy’s directive approach to instruction made sense. Given how short the students’ answers were in comparison to Randy’s monologues, she surmised that Randy did more of the thinking in class than her students did. She wondered if maybe this was necessary given Randy’s assessment of her students’ motivation. In her journal she pondered:

It’s certainly a surer, safer thing to be directive—to ask a question for which there are only a few possible answers. Yet I wonder if it’s not also a bit limiting for discussion, and off-putting for students.

Whereas Jessica began the semester with an open mind about what she could learn from her placement with Randy, her journal revealed that it took a frighteningly short time for the stage to be set for her disengagement. The disconnect between what she encountered in her course work and what she saw in Randy’s classroom was stark and confusing. She wrote in a journal entry only one week later, “I just feel like I know less about teaching and about what I’m supposed to be learning in this placement than I did two weeks ago.” She continued,

I am hoping that some of this is just normal stress, and after talking to two friends from Mills today, I do think that. But I also feel as if what happens in Randy’s classroom is totally divorced from my experiences and readings in class.
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We hoped Jessica’s reflection would bring her to the conclusion that she could learn from this experience in spite of these differences. Sadly, this was not to be the case; instead, she explained:

I can’t see myself taking over in these circumstances at any time. I wouldn’t begin to know what to do because I can’t begin to understand why Randy does what she does with the kids.

Jessica’s struggle to learn from her field placement continued through the remainder of the semester in much the same fashion. She continued to recognize factors in the classroom that mirrored the Mills principles, but in almost all instances the enactments she witnessed were the flip side of the perspectives she was considering in her course work. For about six weeks of this placement, she hung on a precipice on which she attempted to reconcile the disparate “voices of experience” she heard. Her journal entries during this time reflected a continuous battle between what she heard in her classes and what she saw in practice.

Around the six to eight week point in the semester, both Jessica’s supervisor and her advisor had engaged in many conversations with Jessica about her placement and how it might be renegotiated to provide more learning opportunities for her. Our initial thought was to arrange more time for Jessica to teach on her own. Given her view that she had to control what the students heard and did, Randy was reluctant to turn the class over to Jessica in spite of her earlier agreement to do so. At the same time, Jessica’s mounting confusion about teaching—confusion clearly associated with the circumstances of this field placement—made her reluctant to want to take over the class. We suggested to both Jessica and Randy that we place Jessica elsewhere in a situation where she would have more opportunity to teach. These conversations resulted in Jessica deciding that she wanted to stay with Randy, and Randy opening some new opportunities for her in this setting.

Nevertheless, considerable damage had been done by this point with regards to Jessica’s sense of hope in education, and her belief that she was “cut out” to do this work. Jessica’s journals revealed a disturbing shift from trying to make sense of what she was seeing, to questioning herself and the enterprise of teaching. She seemed not to be able to reconcile the discrepancies between what she saw in practice and what she believed. She reasoned that if Randy was right that teaching honors students needed to be largely “telling,” then perhaps teaching was not for her; the compromise was too great. The turning point away from hope came in early October as she prepared to lead the class in a writing activity. She explained in her journal:

I said something to the effect of the kids needing to learn that a thesis was not a yes or no answer but rather an interpretation, and Randy said, “Oh no, a thesis is a yes or no answer. It’s not a simple yes or no answer, but the conclusion it draws must, ultimately, be able to be proven right or wrong.” She said that she knew this was formulaic and not at all asking them to be interpretive; when I suggested that it might
be interesting (I didn’t mention more difficult and educative) to teach them to argue a more ambiguous point, she said, “They can’t handle ambiguity.” Ugh.

Jessica left this conversation defeated. Rather than drawing on what she was learning in her courses and with her colleagues, she became resigned to Randy’s view of teaching. Without much further reflection—and with almost no consideration of her doctor’s advice that she take a couple of days rest—she wrote in her journal:

I’m going to try to go tomorrow. I want to see if I can do this, if I can teach these kids to write in a way that I think is ultimately detrimental to their development. Perhaps this is my “baptism by fire” into the dilemma of needing to teach to tests? Sigh.

From this entry on, Jessica’s journal reflects her sad surrender. Though her journal revealed considerable conversation with her supervisor about how she might frame the experience differently, it is clear that she was not able to sustain a revised or reframed view. From that point on, her journal entries were almost all at the recognition level. There was very little reflection on the principles or on what she was observing. There was only one example of an intention to enact the principles which, importantly, came from observing a class of Randy’s where her teaching approach was “non-honors” and therefore more “constructivist and open.” Aside from that one moment of hope, there were no other entries that revealed any plans to enact the principles in her teaching. Rather than embrace the principles, which is ironically probably exactly what she did initially and what may have led to her despair, she began to consider leaving the profession.

Jessica’s post-placement reflection in December revealed that part of the struggle for her came in trying to understand how Randy could be a Mills graduate and teach as she did. She saw Randy as a reflective teacher, but the outcome of this reflection was the polar opposite of what Jessica imagined it would be. More importantly, it was opposite to the conclusions about teaching and learning that she came to herself. Having gained some distance from the situation, she was able to see that Randy’s teaching came from a particular interpretation of the principles. It was this interpretation rather than the principles themselves that Jessica could then reject. As she later wrote, “There were some key elisions and perversions of the principles, and I think that caused many of the problems with the placement.”

Semester Two

A little rest over the winter holiday, and a new placement at Milford Middle School seemed to restore Jessica to her more hopeful and reflective self. Her first journal entry, though brief, signaled renewed hope. She began by contrasting the classroom management issues that come along with seventh graders as compared with high school juniors. In contemplating the challenge ahead, Jessica noted Dory’s “strict” and yet “caring” management approach. Jessica wondered, “How did she do this?” Early in this second semester as she experienced a positive enactment of what she believed and hoped to accomplish in her own classroom, Jessica seemed
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to step back into a reflective mode. Her question “How does she do this?” implied a recognition that in Dory’s approach, there was something to which she could aspire. Her early journals second semester suggested that the doors for learning were open again.

Jessica described Dory’s classroom as a warm and inviting place where the ownership of knowledge was shared and students were expected to contribute their perspective to the construction of new ideas. Among those students was Jessica, herself:

She views me, other teachers, the students, parents, and administrators as colleagues and partners in the work of our classroom. As I mentioned above, she asks the kids for feedback in their reflections on what is and isn’t working about the curriculum, the instruction, and the classroom environment. She and several other 7th grade teachers meet weekly to discuss how the students are doing.

By inviting the views of others into the classroom conversation, Dory communicated to Jessica an openness to her ideas—a willingness to co-construct teacher knowledge in the same way she co-constructed subject matter knowledge with her students.

From this point on, Jessica’s journal is filled with both recognition and reflective content. She identified corresponding or non-corresponding moments of practice (recognition), and followed that identification with reflection about what she had seen. In all of the remaining journal entries, there was discussion of how she hoped to enact what she was learning in the classroom, or a reflection on what she did enact as a result of her emerging ideas about practice. Laced throughout was evidence of her embracing the principles as well.

The following set of entries demonstrate Jessica’s movement from recognition to reflection as well as her growing confidence in herself, her ways of knowing, and her decision to become a teacher. These entries focus on her reaction to a group of girls in her class.

I am afraid to write this next entry, because it forces me to ask some hard, ugly questions of myself. I notice that the students with whom I’m having the most difficulty in my new placement are the girls, and, moreover, the African American girls. They seem to be the ones who get most of my negative attention.

In the safe context of her placement where questioning one’s reactions to experience is part of the culture, Jessica seemed to be able to take the risk necessary for learning. She wrote:

I’m wondering if they really are the most disruptive students, or if I am just noticing their bad behavior more than the other students’. I am perplexed by this phenomenon, and left wondering what’s causing it. Some old, heretofore unknown racism residing deep in me? Are the students and I playing out some weird battle of cultural conventions here, as Perry Gilmore described in his article “Gimme Room: School Resistance, Attitude, and Access to Literacy”?
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Her reflection continued with a commitment to search for clarity about her reaction to these particular students. Her self-interrogation was guided towards future enactment. She wrote, “If this is the case, I really need to figure out where the girls and I are coming from so that I can ensure we are all on the path we need to be on.”

Stepping back from the situation Jessica reflected on her own values and motivations. Her process demonstrates the opportunity the placement offered her to embrace the principles that guide her practice, and the opportunity to reflect on what she believes and what she wants to do. In her journal she explained:

I really do want to do right by all my students, which means that when they are behaving inappropriately, I feel a moral obligation to call them on it. However, I need to be sure that the kids are really behaving badly, and that I’m not just reacting inappropriately to behavior I don’t understand. Maybe 13 year old girls, particularly African American girls, are just by nature short and rude with the adults they know; maybe treating their teachers, their peers, and their work as unfair, ugly burdens to be borne is just part of a thirteen year old girl’s development.

She ended this entry with a plan of action:

I guess my next step is to figure out two things in order to figure out how to proceed with these girls: (1) Are these girls really acting inappropriately, or am I overreacting to their behavior because I don’t understand it? (2) How can I give the girls the support, the structure, and the discipline they need at this point in their development, while keeping my own blood pressure and sanity intact?

Jessica’s second semester placement provided a true learning context for her. Questions rather than answers were the valued commodity, and the context was safe enough for the questions to be both posited and explored. In this place where she could learn, it seemed that her sense of hope was restored. She attributed this growth to being in a placement where she and her colleague teacher shared a view of the purpose of teaching. “Suddenly, everything I’m learning at Mills makes sense,” she wrote. It made sense to her because she saw in her colleague an approach to teaching that reflected not only the principles she was pondering at Mills, but a blending of those principles in pursuit of excellent outcomes for all students. She wrote:

I had a hard time sorting out what from Dory’s classroom was an example of teaching as a political act, from an example of content knowledge, or the ethic of care, or collegiality, etc. In other words, the principles are all interwoven in her classroom. I think that is so because what interconnects each of the principles is what informs and inspires Dory’s teaching: the fundamental belief that teachers can create equal opportunities for success and achievement, as well as equal outcomes, if we create classrooms that have faith in our kids and our future. This belief is the essential distinction between my two placements: one teacher has it and the other does not. While both cooperating teachers enact the principles in their classrooms, Dory seems optimistic about her kids’ abilities to change their futures, given the opportunity and the tools to do so.
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Concluding Thoughts

The six principles that guide our program are conceptualized to frame learning as the primary focus of teaching. This includes both student learning and teacher learning. What Jessica’s case reveals is that unless learning is the central purpose of teaching, the other principles can be misconstrued and lead to conditions that interfere with learning. Jessica’s case also reveals that the conception of learning itself is problematic rather than given. Depending on one’s view of learning, the act of teaching occurs in different ways.

In our view, learning is an act of construction and the learners are the constructors who make meaning for themselves in response to the learning challenges they face. The remaining Mills program principles fall into this learning-centered conception of teaching by defining how the process is accomplished (with others/colleagues, through the processes of inquiry and reflection) and for what purpose (moral and social purposes as well as—or in combination with—the acquisition of rigorous subject matter knowledge).

In Jessica’s first semester placement the operative conception of learning was not constructivist. Rather than ask students (both the high school students and the student teacher) to engage in making meaning, they were asked to absorb meaning others had made for them. Since the meaning of teaching Randy had made for Jessica was so incomprehensible, foreign, and reprehensible in some ways, her engagement was interrupted thus interrupting her learning as well. The conditions of this learning context left Jessica with feelings of confusion, guilt, and despair because she could not conform to the learning requirements imposed. To survive, she had to disengage.

In the second semester, when the conditions for learning were reversed and Jessica was invited into an exchange of her own making, she re-engaged with the process and took hold of a new feeling of hope. In this second semester placement, the principles were enacted not only in a form recognizable to Jessica, but in a way that surfaced many new questions for her to ponder. Not long into the process she began to imagine enacting those principles in her own practice. Shortly thereafter, when her teaching responsibilities increased, Jessica found herself enacting the very principles she herself was constructing. She provides a closing summary in her journal:

When I worked with Randy, I was very pessimistic about my ability to contribute to, or even stay in, the profession. Now that I am working with Dory, I have hope for my kids’ outcomes and faith in my ability to make a positive contribution to their lives. Since student teachers’ fieldwork provides the context for us to apply the theories we learn in classes, a classroom that embodies the Mills principles with hope and goodwill, such as Dory’s, is the key to successful teacher learning.
Case Two: Sheila

Sheila was a student in the Multiple Subject Credential Program. She came to us with a strong academic and experiential background. In addition to her undergraduate degree in History, she had both a Master's degree and an Educational Specialist Degree in Science Education. Thus, Sheila had both depth and breadth in her subject matter preparation, a real asset for an elementary candidate. Sheila also spent eight years working in a variety of venues, including elementary classrooms, as a science educator and researcher. One of her reference writers said of her,

Sheila is a dedicated and hard working teacher. Visiting her classroom is a joy! She creates situations where students actively participate in the learning process. ... She is an asset to our staff. She sets a tone of mutual respect, professional collegiality and friendliness. ... She is intelligent, knowledgeable and dedicated. Best of all, she truly loves children!

In her application essay, Sheila said that she had “chosen to apply to the Mills College teacher education program because of its emphasis on inquiry-based, reflective teaching practice, facilities for the study of early childhood development at the Children's School, and its commitment to working with diverse populations in urban public schools, to schools that strive for equity and access for all children.” Sheila seemed to have a head start on most of the Mills program principles before she arrived, and thus seemed well situated to derive maximum benefit from the experience. Like Jessica was an exceptionally well prepared teacher candidate.

Sheila's Student Teaching Placements

Elementary candidates are required to spend one semester in a primary classroom (K-3) and one in an upper elementary classroom (4-6). Four of the students in the program have the opportunity to student teach in the Mills College laboratory school. This is a popular option because by definition the situation is designed for the purpose of teacher education. The final decision is made by lottery. Sheila’s name was drawn to be a student teacher in the K/I classroom during the fall semester. The philosophy that guides the Mills Children’s School is very similar to that which guides the credential program; the same principles are a part of the on-going conversation. The children in the school come from the surrounding community, and despite the private school status, they do represent a range on the socioeconomic continuum. Fifty per cent of the students in that K/I classroom are students of color.

Sheila’s cooperating teacher, Connie, was a Mills graduate with five years of teaching experience. She was, therefore, especially well versed in the credential program’s philosophies and structures. Connie had taught in the public schools for three years before joining the Children’s School staff, which meant she could make connections between the private and the public school contexts. It would be hard to imagine a more ideal placement for Sheila.
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For her second semester, Sheila was placed in a fifth grade at Ellis Elementary School in a local urban district. The school was recently rebuilt and had been designed to foster collaboration among students, staff, and community. Ellis had just received a grant to become a science magnet school, which, of course, had particular appeal to Sheila. The student population is very diverse and includes many Spanish-speakers. The socioeconomic status also represents a range but is generally below that of the Mills Children’s School. According to Sheila, there were “concerns throughout the school about students’ very low scores on standardized tests such as the SAT 9. Many teachers are also extremely frustrated with what they describe as uncooperative and disrespectful student behavior.”

Alice, Sheila’s cooperating teacher, had been teaching for about fifteen years, most of that time in the same district and with this age group. She was, as was everyone, new to this particular school—a school still very much involved in the process of inventing itself. Alice was struggling with the same issues her colleagues had regarding test scores and student behavior. Sheila wrote,

Alice is aware that her current approach to teaching is not meeting her goals. She told me she is in the process of reevaluating her teaching and that she wants to start next year differently. She has expressed a wish that she could reach more of her students and is struggling with how to make this happen. She has been participating in various forms of professional development that has exposed her to new teaching strategies, some of which she is beginning to implement. Her courage to admit that what once seemed to work for her no longer does, and that she is ready to become involved in the process of change, is very significant.

Alice was a relatively new cooperating teacher for us so we did not know a lot about her when making the placement. Her receptivity as well as the context led us to believe that this would be a good situation for Sheila.

The differences between Sheila’s two student teaching placements turned out to be enormous. Our intent is not to explore the reasons behind these differences, but to examine the contexts in terms of their ability to serve as opportunities for Sheila to learn the program principles. From her perspective, all six principles were an integral part of the K/I classroom in the Mills Children’s school. The cooperating teacher was consistent in her enactment of them both with the children and with her. In contrast, Sheila seemed to think that none of the principles were present in the fifth grade setting at Ellis. Although the teacher did seem aware of and concerned about some of them, particularly the ethic of care, she did not operationalize them in her practice either with the students or with Sheila. How did Sheila respond to these different contexts? How did they seem to influence her ability to recognize, reflect upon, enact, and embrace the program principles?

Semester One

Sheila’s first semester journal entries indicate that her placement with Connie afforded her the opportunity to accomplish all four of the program goals: recognition,
reflection, enactment, and embracing. Indeed evidence that this was happening appeared very early. In the second week in September, she made the following entry:

I think my temptation in the past as a teacher has been to give children the "answers" because I haven't known how to provide them with the kind of guidance that helps them get to the next level. I realize that the struggle they go through in learning is important, and that it is essential that the learning is "theirs." Finding the balance between letting children figure things out for themselves and create their own meaning, while providing them with the kind of support that is helpful in this process has felt difficult for me to achieve. Working on finding this balance is one of my goals as a student teacher.

In this instance Sheila recognized a set of circumstances relevant to constructivist/developmental learning theory, which is itself noteworthy. Recognition of this principle is often a long time in coming for many of our student teachers. But she did not stop there; she reflected upon the implications of what she had witnessed. She reconsidered her previous practice in light of this experience and came to a new realization about the learning process. And she took it even further; by the end of the passage, she embraced the principle by identifying it as a goal of her student teaching.

Just three days later Sheila's journal shows her exploring the principles of teaching as a political act and teaching as moral work based upon an ethic of care. She began by describing an incident wherein one of the children had been telling the class about his last soccer game when he played against a team of "Spanish guys." Both she and Connie had detected a "derogatory tone in his voice." Sheila "was really interested in the way Connie handled the situation. It seemed like she was able to help Doug and the class reflect on his comment without making him defensive."

Sheila seemed to recognize that political issues—questions of morality and equity—were inherent in this situation and she drew upon her experiences in one of the Mills classes to do so. This led her to reflect upon the way in which she communicated with children. She then decided to take action—to enact the principles—by examining the way language was used in the classroom.
on her own experience: "The familiarity pitfall is one that I think I have been struggling with since I began at the Children's School, and I am concerned it is interfering with my ability to be reflective about my student teaching experiences." Here she was reflecting on her own reflective process. She followed this with an aside to her supervisor: "Dana, you and I have had some discussions about this issue before." She proceeded to describe the similarities between her elementary school experiences, which she felt were very beneficial for her, and her current classroom and to acknowledge that what worked for her may not work for everyone—a very important step in the development of a teacher.

What her deliberations make clear is that the high degree of compatibility between Sheila and her placement could actually be a barrier to reflection. Without the course reading and interaction with her supervisor through her journal and conversation, she might not have raised questions about the universal value of what she was experiencing.

By the end of October, Sheila's entries were consistently exemplary of the developmental process we envision for our student teachers. She not only recognized the principles in the context, she engaged in substantive reflection on their meaning for her beliefs and practices, she described instances of her enactment of the principles, and she embraced them as guides for her future practice. The following entry is representative:

The Mills program is really pushing me to question my own assumptions about what are appropriate concepts for children to be learning and what my goals as a teacher are. ... I am feeling more and more that I need to justify my decisions for myself and for others and I think it is a really important process to go through. It ultimately makes teaching more meaningful for me and hopefully increases the educational potential of lessons for students. For example, I have a sense from my experiences teaching science last year, from different curricular guides and frameworks, and from Linda's developmental psych. class that classifying and sorting are thinking processes that are important to begin developing during the primary school years. I am thinking about working on these skills in the context of the bird investigation that I am creating for the K/1 class. As a result of developing this particular lesson I have been thinking a lot about not only what happens when children sort and classify but also what they do with these experiences. ... Is it enough to just "do" the sorting? ... I am interested in learning more about the significance of sorting and classifying for young children since, in many ways, it seems like a "traditional" activity that is uncritically accepted as part of the elementary school curriculum.

Most of Sheila's journal entries not only included multiple examples of the process; they also contained clues as to what had made the process possible for her. One of the impetuses for reflection came from a "difficult" teaching experience that was observed and debriefed by her supervisor and discussed in the daily noontime meeting with Connie and her fellow student teachers:

As a result of this lesson initially being so difficult for me to teach, I have ended up
learning more about it than about many of the other activities I have worked on this semester. Much of the learning that went on for me was about the cognitive abilities and limitations of children of this age. I saw evidence of much of the preoperational thinking that we have been learning about in Linda’s class. This experience also made me realize how important it is to have colleagues to problem solve with and to help you gain insight into the many challenges of teaching children.

The significance of this opportunity to learn from a less than satisfactory lesson is made apparent in her post-placement reflections in December:

One of the most significant and meaningful aspects of my experience as a student teacher at the Children’s School was observing and participating in the creation of a safe, respectful community of learners. I saw over and over again how children could feel empowered by having ownership of the learning process. Being part of this type of learning environment helped me to take the risks I needed to as a student teacher. I developed ownership of the teaching process because I had the opportunity to adapt lessons and to develop curricular units based on rationales that I had constructed. Developing ownership of the teaching process was possible because of the opportunity to take risks and to engage in reflective practice with my colleagues at the Children’s School.

The consistency between the philosophies of the Children’s School and the teacher education program is undoubtedly another reason that this first semester placement may have functioned as a true learning context for Sheila. In looking back on her experience she claimed that all of the principles were not only present, they were interrelated: We were all optimistic that the second semester placement would provide a different, yet equally beneficial, opportunity for Sheila to continue to learn and grow, however, that was not to be the case.

**Semester Two**

Very early in the second semester, signs of trouble began to appear, as is apparent in an entry written during the third week of her placement in which Sheila raised questions about their teaching of a civil rights unit during Black History Month:

It seems pretty clear that Alice and I have fallen into the pitfall of using this “additive approach”.... Banks has pushed me to think about how some of the issues and themes that have emerged from this unit could be extended beyond this month and examined more deeply over a longer period of time. At least half the class is African-American. What kind of message are we sending to say that we will only study their history for one month and then we will get back to the “standard” curriculum on explorers and discoverers?

Other comments in the passage made it apparent that not only were there some disconnects between what she was experiencing in her coursework and in her fieldwork, she was also uncertain about what to do about it.

Shortly thereafter, Sheila wrote more extensively about these anxieties. She reiterated her concerns about the classroom climate and then related a story about
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a disturbing occasion in which a student was humiliated because he could not answer one of the teacher's questions. She described her reactions in this way:

I think this and other similar incidents have made me feel like this classroom is not a place where it is safe to take risks, to say, "I don't understand" and to feel that it's okay not to have the "right" answer. I have many other examples of this from these first few weeks. I wonder if this climate is making me as a student teacher feel very inhibited about trying new things. I think I fear that Alice will direct the same criticism at me that I see her directing towards her students. The thought of children being afraid of making mistakes makes me feel very sad. This classroom feels very foreign to me.

Though Sheila was still recognizing the presence, or more accurately, the absence of the principles and attempting to reflect on the implications of that absence, she was beginning to doubt the possibility of enactment.

Almost all of Sheila's remaining entries stayed at the recognition level. Most were recognitions of a mismatch between program principles and her placement classroom. This was in stark contrast to the complex, thoughtful and inclusive (of all four levels) passages from the previous semester. In one of only two instances of reflection that did appear, Sheila focused more on the dilemma created by the placement than on the meaning and implications of developmental learning theory for her current or future practice:

I wonder if my experience as a student teacher in Alice's class is similar to her students' experiences. She has this very administrative approach to teaching. I often feel like she would rather teach it, and teach it efficiently, rather than risk my doing a slightly "messier" job. In a similar way it seems like she would rather tell students how to do something than give them the opportunity to discover it for themselves and to share this process with the class. If my analysis of Alice's general approach to teaching is accurate it doesn't seem to support constructivist learning very well... I also need to think seriously about how I am going to incorporate more constructivist based approaches to learning into the curriculum when the structure and support for that approach may not be there.

She raised the question of enactment but she had no idea how that might happen in this context; indeed she felt she might be at risk if she were to do so:

She talks to me a lot about the what of her teaching but rarely about the why. To learn more about the why I am going to have to ask many more questions of Alice. I have been reluctant to do this because early in my placement she was quite defensive when I asked questions about her curricular or classroom management decisions. This is not conducive to reflective interactions between the two of us.

Sheila did not engage in much reflection, was hesitant to enact, and spoke not at all of embracing because the context did not feel safe to Sheila and, from her perspective, it did not seem safe for the students either. Nor did she believe the principles were evident.

In one of her last entries, a ray of hope appeared as Sheila noted a change of
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atmosphere—"a sense of community that I haven’t often experienced." The primary reason for that seemed to be a new classroom management system that she and Alice had implemented which was suggested and designed by Sheila. She had finally taken the risk to enact—to try to put into practice a pedagogical strategy based more on an ethic of care and collegiality than anything currently in operation and, as a result, had begun to transform the experience for herself. According to subsequent comments from her and her supervisor, things continued to improve.

Concluding Thoughts

One way to characterize the distinction between Sheila’s two placements is that one was a positive exemplar of the program principles and one was a negative exemplar. In her first semester she was able to see the principles in action and in the second she was not. In the latter instance then she had to try to envision on her own what such principled practice might look like in that context. Fortunately however, she was not on her own; she still had her coursework, colleagues, and supervisor to support her in the process. Sheila concluded her reflective analysis of her student teaching experiences halfway through her second placement this way:

While I felt safe and able to take risks in my teaching at the Children’s School, the fact that I haven’t in Alice’s class has forced me to confront things in myself that are important to address. The nature of my current placement has also required me to consider some of the following questions, “How will I respond when certain contextual factors threaten to interfere with my philosophy of teaching and learning? How can I take the risks necessary to have ownership of my teaching when I may not have the support for doing this?” I have found that the characteristics of each of my two placements have highlighted different strengths and weaknesses in my teaching abilities. For this reason I think both of my placements have involved a tremendous amount of learning and hopefully will lead to my growth as a teacher as well.

Sheila felt that one of the main reasons she was able to learn from her second placement was because her Mills supervisor provided her with so much support: "When I despaired, she helped me see the educative potential of this experience.” Nonetheless, it is clear that Sheila’s learning process was significantly interrupted by the new placement. Journal entries that had been replete with reflection, enactment, and embracing regressed to mere recognition, and negative recognition at that. The focus of what little reflection did occur was more upon her struggles with the placement itself than with her own developing philosophies. The primary reason for the arrested development seemed to be an absence of safety. Because the situation did not reflect our program principles, efforts to try to enact them in that classroom would require and result in a significant change. Those efforts may or may not have been successful; either way was risky business. If Sheila failed, she might be subjected to the same kind of humiliation she feared the students felt. If she succeeded, Alice might become defensive—even the proposal of alternatives might be experienced by her as a criticism.
Though Sheila lost confidence, at least temporarily, she never questioned her own decision to go into teaching. She wondered about how she might go about enacting the principles in this particular context, but she did not seem to question the merits or possibilities of the principles themselves. But Sheila was in her second semester, she had substantial support from the program, and she entered with a strong educational and practical background. Sheila was already well on her way to understanding and embracing the program principles when she arrived. If the regression in both her thought and her action were as substantial as it appeared to be in her journal entries, what might it be like for other student teachers, most of whom have not had her educational experience? Since research has shown that teachers tend to teach like their cooperating teachers regardless of whether they agreed with them at the time, what might be the long-term repercussions of this negative exemplar?

**Fieldwork As A Learning Context: Four Dimensions**

From these cases we have identified four dimensions of student teaching placements that seem to render them learning contexts for teaching. In discussing these dimensions, we attempt to make clear our view of how each connects with our program principles, and how it contributes (or does not contribute) to the learning potential of the fieldwork experience.

*Nested Learning*

Early on in our analysis it became clear to us that an important indicator of whether a particular classroom might be a good learning context for our student teachers was whether it was a good learning context for children. It seems to us that those principles that frame learning for children (constructivist/developmental learning theory, reflection, and collegiality) frame learning for student teachers as well. Jessica’s and Sheila’s journals suggest that those classrooms where the children are invited into learning conversations with their peers and with the teacher are the same classrooms where the student teachers felt invited into learning conversations about the work of teaching. Similarly, in those situations where children were less involved as co-constructors of knowledge, the student teachers were less involved in the construction of knowledge about teaching.

The journals of both student teachers revealed that they reflected on both the learning context for their students and for themselves. Sheila discussed her setting as a classroom where the students were given few opportunities to “reveal who they are” or to “personalize the curriculum” because Alice was worried that the students “cover the material.” Likewise, Jessica mentioned Randy’s “directive” teaching style which Randy argued was necessary if the students were to learn all that they needed to learn in honors English. According to Jessica, Randy considered constructivist learning theory a “nice idea,” but “completely unrealistic in a
modern, urban, heterogeneous class ... with students from such a wide variety of backgrounds.”

The notion of leading students to a foregone conclusion and limiting discussion suggests a learning context where reflection is not prized and where the teacher preempts the making of meaning. This is an issue that Sheila directed us to consider when she asked in her journal if her experience “as a student teacher in Alice’s class is similar to her students’ experiences” in that same room.

An important point is raised by this idea of nested contexts of learning in a student teaching placement classroom. If the argument we are suggesting here is true, and the conditions for learning that frame the experience of children in a particular classroom mirror those that frame the learning opportunities for student teachers, it is possibly also true that the conditions for learning for the teacher herself, are similarly defined. Another way for us to frame this argument would be to consider as a criterion for student teaching placement classrooms where there is evidence that the teachers themselves are learners about their practice. In those classrooms where teachers are learners about their practice, student teachers can be learners about their practice as well.

**Blending Principles**

When we conceptualized the principles, we envisioned them as interconnected parts of a whole. Our study brought to our attention how important these connections are to creating a student teaching placement that “works.” The data of these two case studies reveal that the student teachers searched for evidence of all of the principles in their fieldwork settings, and it was those settings where a composite of the principles was present that most student teacher learning occurred. Jessica spoke to this directly in describing Dory’s classroom: “I realize that I had a hard time sorting out what from Dory’s classroom was an example of teaching as a political act, from an example of content knowledge, or the ethic of care, or collegiality, etc.”

In the nested learning discussion above, we argued that settings where children are offered multiple opportunities for constructing knowledge are probably the same settings as those where student teachers will have opportunities for constructing knowledge. These settings are also likely to contain opportunities for collegiality and reflection since collegiality and reflection go hand in hand with powerful learning of a constructivist type. There are moral considerations to this approach to knowledge construction as well. Shelia provides a good example of this when she describes how Connie emphasizes “ownership” in the learning context she creates: If students are free to make their own sense of things, then what they think and believe is probably valued in the context of the school.

**Safety**

A place where one’s ideas and beliefs are valued suggests a place where safety is the norm. Student teachers need to feel safe if they are to move beyond the
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Recognition of program principles into the processes of reflecting on them, enacting them in their teaching, and embracing some construction of them into their own practice. This dimension of safety suggests that student teachers need to be comfortable enough to take risks—to try out things they have not tried before in contexts that are not of their own making, nor under their full control. They need to feel supported in asking questions and exploring optional interpretations and responses. In their successful placements, both Jessica and Sheila describe situations where they either tried untested interventions or raised and explored hard questions about challenging issues. We found that this did not tend to occur in the difficult placements.

Only Sheila spoke very explicitly about the importance of safety or its absence to her development as a teacher. In her journals the word appears with great frequency both when she is describing the students’ situation or her own. She emphasizes how much feeling safe contributed to her learning in the Children’s School and how its absence at Ellis interfered with her progress: “The atmosphere in the classroom was not conducive to taking risks and it did not feel safe. I did not sense students had the freedom to express their misconceptions, confusion or questions. This made me feel very inhibited during my first few weeks in Alice’s class and I continue to struggle with this.”

Interesting questions arise as to why Sheila discussed this issue so directly and so often and Jessica did not. It could be due to differences in personality, individual need or priority. It could also be due to the nature of the incompatibility the student teachers felt in the difficult settings where they worked. Here, the theme of “nested-learning” contexts seems connected. If the classroom is unsafe for students, the learning situation is also unsafe for the student teacher. Such an environment exacerbates the problem of mismatch. If the cooperating teacher neither believes in, nor enacts the program principles, the student teacher necessarily goes out on a limb when she tries to enact something that is consistent with them. This is especially dangerous with an unsupportive cooperating teacher because there is risk either way; if she fails, she may not only be severely criticized, she may come to believe that such change is not possible, and if she succeeds, she may be seen as threatening and subject to harsh faultfinding anyway.

Reflective Focus

This issue of compatibility leads us towards our last of the dimensions of the field placement that our study revealed as important for professional growth. The compatibility influences both the focus of a student teacher’s reflection and her/his ability to reflect. It also opens up the potential of directed reflection that is an aspect of the reflective potential of the fieldwork situation we will discuss further below. In terms of reflection, we found that the difficult (or less compatible) contexts seemed to co-opt the attention of the credential candidate. The psychic energy devoted to figuring out how to negotiate the setting left little time or energy for the
student teacher to concentrate on the development of her own philosophy and practices. Both Sheila’s and Jessica’s journal entries during their less compatible assignments were replete with discussions of their struggles. They wrote at length about the negative things witnessed and, though they reflected on those events, their reflections were more concerned with their immediate situations and their relationships with their cooperating teachers, than with their own learning or their future teaching.

In contrast, the journal entries from the strong placements contained multiple instances of reflection on their own developing beliefs and practices. Their focus in these settings was consistently and clearly on their developing ideas about teaching. They grappled with the principles by working to understand them. In certain instances we could even view how they began to integrate them into their own thinking. In the best of these instances, they were also free to apply them to their current work and imagine how they would be part of their future practice. In the weaker placements, their reflections focused on surviving the moment and on understanding their cooperating teacher rather than understanding themselves. In the end, the reflection focus on the cooperating teacher (rather than the practices at hand or their own growth) was less conducive to professional growth of the type we envisioned.

A further aspect of this reflective focus dimension concerns how the student teaching context functions as a place where the programs’ other components (the course work and the student teacher supervisors) are able to engage as triggers for the students’ reflective work. In particular, we were interested to learn whether the classroom was a place for examining the ideas raised by the coursework as these ideas are potentially enacted in the life of classrooms and schools. We found ample evidence in the data that course readings and discussions that are organized around the principles serve as reflection triggers for our student teachers. On numerous occasions the students’ entries refer to how an idea from the literature is evidenced in practice, or how a question a professor has raised is evidenced or absent in the placement as well.

As important to the process of triggering reflection, however, is facilitating it once it has begun. It is clear from both the journal entries and from the post-journal reflections that the primary facilitators of this continued process of reflection are the student teaching supervisors. Through informal conversations, lesson observation debriefings and in their journal responses, the supervisors support the student teachers in their explorations; they encourage, prod, model, and extend. If the trigger hasn’t come from elsewhere, they will provide that too.

Because both Jessica and Sheila stress the important role their supervisors played in their ability to reflect, we must include this aspect of the fieldwork component of our program as we outline what we learned from these two student teachers about how to learn to teach from practice teaching in the field. Jessica summed it up this way:
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She helped me to look at even the most difficult, uncomfortable situations as possibly educative. She helped me develop a set of critical tools to find something to learn from bad teaching, bad schools, and seemingly hopeless situations. Because of her supervision, I feel that I am in a constant state of reflection, with my eye always on the prize of becoming a great teacher.

Implications For Practice And Further Study

Our concerns about the fieldwork portion of our program have been confirmed by the study we have conducted here. We have learned that even students who already have experience, who are well grounded in their disciplines, who are generally reflective, and who have already embraced the goal of social justice have difficulty in discrepant placements. The primary implications for teacher education practice, which entail questions for further study are: (1) the order of placements may matter; weaker placements seem to be even more detrimental in the first semester than in the second; (2) well-designed coursework can serve as a trigger to reflection in both strong and weak placements; (3) supervisors can function as supports to the whole reflective cycle if they are well-versed in and proponents of the program principles; and (4) compatible placements are more conducive to growth so we need to do all we can to find and develop such opportunities.

Placement Order

Jessica had the difficult placement first. In the course of this experience she raised serious questions about the feasibility of teaching according to our program principles, indeed about teaching at all. In the absence of any classroom models of the theories she was learning in her courses, she nearly gave up hope:

I spent a large part of my semester considering leaving the program, thinking that I had made the wrong choice, that teaching wouldn’t work for me. Randy and many of her colleagues are miserable; I was, too. Even life at Pacific Bell seemed better, more fulfilling and less pessimistic than this. This placement made my coursework extremely difficult for me, because I didn’t see anything I was learning in action. This not only made me doubt the validity of what I was learning at Mills, but also made me, as a student, struggle to engage with the subject matter in my classes, because there was no meaningful context for me. There was no way to have a Dewey-esque interaction between my education and my experience.

Sheila, on the other hand, did not engage in such serious doubting. Though she struggled with the situation and experienced a significant setback in her reflective process, she did not sink to such depths. She questioned neither her own decision to go into teaching, nor the value of the program principles. She recognized many problems in the context and sometimes wondered if she could do anything differently while there, but only while there. Even with that, later journal entries indicated that she was beginning to take steps to enact some of the program principles she had already embraced, which may be a key to the difference. She was
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much more familiar with the program principles; she had seen positive examples of them in operation and knew that they could work; and she had more firmly incorporated them into her own belief system. It may be that inconsistent placements in the second semester are not as great a problem as they are in the first. This will be a question we will want to investigate further.

**Well-designed Coursework**

The student teachers referred with great frequency to issues, ideas, and questions presented and explored in their Mills classes. The data shared in this article reflect this well; they are representative of all the data we collected from the student teachers we studied. The frequency of references to course work is all the more significant because there is no requirement for the student teachers to do so. They are asked to reflect in their professional journals on their student teaching experiences but without specification as to how. Sometimes a course reading would remind them of something that had happened in their placement and cause them to re-consider that incident in light of this new information. At other times an experience in the classroom would remind them of a previous reading or collegial discussion that would encourage them to explore alternative interpretations and responses. This is, of course, encouraging news; our activities and assignments seem to be supporting the process of recognizing, reflecting upon, enacting, and embracing our program principles. But many questions remain. Are there some assignments and activities that are better than others, and if so, which ones and why? Do they work as well for student teachers who do not have such strong educational or experiential backgrounds and/or who are not already well on their way to understanding and embracing program principles? Many faculty members have engaged in research on such questions. Several examples come from our own work that led us to this current study (LaBoskey, 1997, 1998, 2000; LaBoskey & Cline, 2000; Richert, 1997, 1998, 2000).

**Supervisor Support**

It is absolutely clear from our study that supervisors are vitally important in helping the student teachers learn lessons about the program principles from their fieldwork experiences. Our discussion of this at the end of the findings section of the paper presents some of the reasons why. A question that we have as we consider this finding is how we can build this mentoring or supervisory piece of our program into a more substantial and legitimate piece. While most of our faculty supervise one or two of the student teachers, the majority of supervision of our students is done by part time associates who are not supported particularly well in their learning of the program principles, nor compensated well for their critically important work. A first step for us, then, is to try to rectify these programmatic arrangements. One important part of that rectification needs to include professional development opportunities for the supervisors where they, too, can examine in a parallel manner
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the program principles and how those principles might inform their supervisory work.

There are many questions that emerge from our finding regarding the supervisors as well. We wonder what kind of professional development would be most powerful for supervisors’ learning about the principles, for example. Are there supervision strategies that work well in “problematic” settings that might be altered for settings where there is greater correspondence between the program goals and the teaching at the site? Which strategies are most powerful for which situations, how do supervisors best learn those strategies, and how do we determine whether they are successful, when they are successful, and in what ways they are successful?

Compatible Placements

The final implication of our study is the one idea we had about placement before we began this investigation: we need to find better places for our students to student teach. What we have learned from this work is what a “better” placement ought to include; they need to be safe, nested contexts for learning where the principles are well blended and where there is a reflective focus to the work. With a richer understanding of why difficult placements are difficult, and what learning challenges they present for even the most talented of our student teachers, we are better equipped to search for placements that will serve the principled practice goals that we have. But given the reality of how hard it will be to find a plethora of such placements, we have also concluded that we need to work more closely with our school-based colleagues to create such settings. We have recently been funded to create a Teacher Institute for Urban Fieldwork where we will be working with some of our cooperating teachers and supervisors to enhance the benefits of the fieldwork experience for all constituencies.

As we think back to the opening of this paper and to our concern for creating an integrated program that is consistent throughout, we have become clearer about the consequences of the placement match with program principles. Given what we have learned, we realize even more clearly that teacher education programs should persist in asking how we can work toward creating the circumstances where all of our cooperating teachers in all of our placements teach in ways that embody our program principles. At the same time we need to consider ways of preparing and supporting all student teachers to make the most of more discrepant placements, since, despite our best efforts, that scenario is likely to continue. This study helps to reveal some ways in which we might do so: by having the least compatible placements come later in the student teacher’s experience; by having well-designed, well-integrated coursework that supports the learning of program principles; by having supervisors who are well-grounded in program philosophy and adequately supported by the institution; and by working more closely with cooperating teachers so that all might understand and model the program’s principles. Only when we accomplish these goals will we be able to claim
that in the fieldwork portion of our programs, we do indeed "practice what we preach."

Notes

1 The responsibility for this paper was shared equally between both authors. Authorship is alphabetical.
2 All of the names (people and schools) in this paper are pseudonyms with the exception of the names of the Mills College faculty, and Mills College itself.
3 Currently we are a faculty of five full and six part time people. Six of the eleven returned the survey.
4 One question that lingers for us is why it is that Randy, a Mills graduate, teaches in a way that appears to Jessica to be so different from what she learned at Mills. This question warrants deep consideration on our part as our study of our students' learning opportunities continues.
5 As a laboratory school, the Mills Children's School classrooms always have more than one student teacher working in them at a time. The "Head Teacher" and the student teachers meet daily for discussion and debriefing before school and during lunch.
6 She had just read several articles by James Banks in her courses, Curriculum and Instruction in the Elementary School and Introduction to the Profession of Teaching Diverse Learners.
7 It might be inferred that the difficulties Sheila encountered were due to the fact that she had embraced the program principles and was frustrated and disturbed by their absence in the placement. But she did not discuss that directly in any of her entries.

References


Identifying Good Student Teaching Placements


Exploring Roles in Student Teaching Placements

By Mari Koerner & Frances O’Connell Rust
with Frances Baumgartner

If we want to grow in practice, we have two primary places to go: to the inner ground from which good teaching comes and to the community of fellow teachers from whom we can learn more about ourselves and our craft.

—Parker Palmer, 1998, p. 141

Most teachers claim that the most important elements in their professional education were the school experiences found in student teaching (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). Student teaching is the culminating experience in a teacher education program. For good or ill, this experience has a significant impact on the student teacher who must juggle the responsibilities of teaching (and all that entails) while establishing and developing relationships with one or more cooperating teachers and a university supervisor. Student teachers are surrounded not only by other adults who share in certain power relationships with them but also with children with whom they share a different sort of power relationship (Hargreaves,
Thus, student teaching is a complicated emotional and interpersonal experience that is often critically important to the making of a teacher.

What makes for a good student teaching experience? Do student teachers have different opinions about it than cooperating teachers and university-based supervisors and teacher educators? These are the questions that we pursue in this paper. To find the answers to these questions, we piloted a questionnaire with 21 student teachers and their cooperating teachers and seven university-based supervisors who worked with them. Our aim was to find out if there is tacit agreement among the various participants in student teaching about what a good student teaching experience looks like and about the roles that each participant should play. Further, we wondered if there are common understandings about what each participant should know and be able to do.

Roles and Functions in Student Teaching Placements

While much research about student teaching experiences seems to have been shaped by the interests of teacher educators who want to find out how they can best prepare student teachers (Zeichner & Liston, 1987), there is relatively little that focuses on how the various players construe their roles and how they read their impact on each other (Hauwiller, Abel, Ausel, & Sparapani, 1988). Research on the participants in the student teaching experience includes studies that focus on the influence student teaching has on the student teacher (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981; Morin, 1993); studies that focus on what knowledge cooperating teachers need to effectively carry out their role in the process (Hauwiller et al, 1988; Copas, 1994); studies that focus on the mentoring aspects of the cooperating teacher’s role (Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1993); and studies that focus on supervisory aspects of the work of cooperating teachers and college supervisors with student teachers (Guyton, 1987; Morin & Lemlach, 1987). Ganser (1996) suggests that there is a lack of clarity in defining roles and responsibilities of cooperating teachers and university supervisors. He contends that lack of definition explains the wide variance in the ways in which cooperating teachers, supervisors, and student teachers interact.

The Cooperating Teacher Role

Cooperating teachers are generally understood to be classroom teachers who participate in a teacher education program by agreeing to work with preservice teachers in their classrooms. “Cooperating teachers,” write Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1987), “set the affective and intellectual tone and also shape what student teachers learn by the way they conceive and carry out their roles as teacher educators” (p.256). Some cooperating teachers serve as mentors to student teachers. Some allow student teachers into their classrooms as participant observers. Still others see student teachers as colleagues in their own professional development.
Enz and Cook (1992) investigated student and cooperating teachers’ perceptions of the roles and functions of the cooperating teacher. More salient than being effective models of instruction, Enz and Cook write that

Cooperating teachers ought to be selected because they demonstrate the qualities of effective mentors. In addition to instructional and management strengths, effective cooperating teachers should be caring, active listeners who are sensitive to the views of others and who are able and willing to articulate the intricacies of their craft and the subtleties of the school culture. (p. 13)

Studies by Sudzina and Coolican (1994), Gotliffe (1994), McWilliams (1995), and Graham (1996) expand the notion of cooperating teacher as mentor. Feiman-Nemser and Parker (1993) compared two programs for mentoring beginning teachers. Their work suggests that contextual factors affect the benefits mentees receive from their mentors. Feiman-Nemser and Parker found that formal expectations, working conditions, selection, and preparation were particularly important in determining what roles mentors assume:

In addition to socializing functions, mentor teachers may serve as educational companions who help student or beginning teachers reflect on their experiences in order to gain insights that will support development of their teaching skills. Mentor teachers who act as agents of change seek to break down barriers that prevent teachers from sharing, inquiring, and collaborating about their teaching. (pp. 716-717)

A number of studies of the relationship between cooperating teachers and student teachers take the student teacher’s perspective (Copas, 1984; Rikard & Veal, 1996). Karmos and Jacko (1977) looked at the importance of “Significant Others” in the student teacher experience. Student teachers in their study named twelve categories of others who had an impact on their student teaching. Cooperating teachers were at the top of the list. Student teachers rated cooperating teachers’ influence high in the areas of personal support, role development, and professional skills. Copas (1984) study describes student teachers’ perceptions of critical requirements for cooperating teachers in an elementary school, based on a “broad definition of the cooperating teacher’s role” (p. 49) rather than on his or her personal qualities. She found that student teachers wanted cooperating teachers who were models of good pedagogy and classroom management notes and that, “the value of the direct learning experience in schools (for student teachers) seems to depend upon the quality of the teacher with whom the student teacher is placed” (p. 49).

Gonzalez and Carter (1996) used the concept of well-remembered events to examine interpretations of classroom events by both cooperating teachers and student teachers. They conclude that “even though student teachers and cooperating teachers often share experiences, they do not necessarily have a shared understanding of what that experience means” (p. 39). Grimmett and Ratzlaff (1986) studied expectations for cooperating teachers from the points of view of student teachers, university supervisors, and cooperating teachers themselves. Like Copas (1984),
they found that student teachers expect cooperating teachers to provide them with
the basic information needed to adjust to the student teaching placement, help them
acquire materials, involve them in planning and evaluation, hold conferences with
them regularly, observe them teach, and provide feedback on their teaching.

These findings emphasize the importance of communication between cooper-
ating teacher and student teacher, and call attention to the importance of conver-
sation as a means of exploring the ways in which student teachers think about
teaching. According to Gonzalez and Carter, (1996), cooperating teachers have a
unique opportunity to use shared narratives not only to help their student teachers,
but also to learn from each other by a common examination of classroom events.
Ganser (1996, 1997) believes that being a cooperating teacher could have a
significant effect on the cooperating teacher’s own work and career. “Improving the
effect that serving as a cooperating teacher can have on an experienced teacher’s
work and career,” he writes, “is related to improving teaching itself” (p. 288).

The Supervisor Role

An equally complex role is that played by the university supervisor (Snyder
& D’Emidio-Gaston, 2001). In the triad of the student teaching or practicum
experience, the participant who generally receives the least recognition and has
been least studied (Griffin, 1985) is the university supervisor. Yet, our research
(Koerner & Rust, 2000) suggests that the supervisor can play a critical role in the
success of the experience. Case studies by Freidus (2000), Koerner & Rust (2000),
Rust and Bullmaster (2000), and Richert, LaBoskey, and Kroll (2000) as well as
work by Snyder and D’Emidio-Gaston (2001) suggest that supervisors often serve
as translators of the values and beliefs of the teacher education program. LaBoskey,
Kroll, & Galguera (2001), found that there was little explicit mention of the teacher
education program principles by either student teachers or cooperating teachers,
however, university supervisors referred to program principles in both the com-
ments section and the narrative page of the student teaching assessment. Thus, it
is ironic that the selection of student teaching supervisors is often done on the basis
of availability rather than on the basis of experience and credentials (Snyder &

Whether a supervisor is prepared specifically for this role appears to be a matter
of happenstance. Many are drawn from the ranks of retired teachers and principals,
and in many university settings, graduate students with some teaching experience
are also part of the pool of supervisors. Some supervisors may come to the job having
learned to supervise as craft from a skilled mentor; others may come with formal
academic course work; still others may rely completely on their experience as
teachers and their memories of student teaching.

But the influence of supervisors transcends their position as a go-between for
the University and the School. We know that supervisors tend to hold tacit images
of the good student teacher that may only be articulated in situations that challenge
those ideals (Rust, 1989; Snyder & D’Emidio-Gaston, 2001); and we know that supervisors can play a critical role in helping student teachers make sense of their work in ways that will translate into future practice (Orland, 2001 and this volume).

**The Student Teacher Role**

Considerable research has been done over the past 20 years on student teachers’ thinking and emerging understandings of the work of teaching. We know, for example, that many draw on an apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1976) to guide their actual practice as student teachers and later as teachers, that often their understandings of the work of teaching are shaped by myth (Britzman, 1988), and that teacher education courses and programs generally function to obscure preservice teachers’ beliefs and understandings as they learn to adopt the jargon of the academy (Rust, 1989, 1993; Zeichner & Gore, 1990). However, relatively little work addresses their specific expectations for student teaching.

Student teachers walk a delicate line. On the one hand, they are students learning about a profession, its language, its practice. They take courses during part of the day, and they are at work in classrooms with children and teachers during part of the day. On the other hand, they are novice professionals and are expected to know something of practice, to take initiative, and to demonstrate competence. Lortie (1975) and others tell us that for their decisions about what to do in classrooms and how to act, student teachers and new teachers often draw more on their apprenticeships of observation—those years of being a student in a classroom observing and experiencing teachers at work—than they do the curriculum of teacher education. Britzman (1988) suggests that student teachers draw on educational myths to make sense of some of the critical dilemmas of teaching. Fuller & Bown (1975) describe student teachers’ movement from survival to efficacy in terms that suggest the critical importance of both the supervisor and cooperating teacher to provide support, encouragement, and models of practice. However, there is considerable debate among educational researchers about the impact on teacher thinking and teacher practice of teacher education in general and of the student teaching experience in particular.

**The Study**

It is difficult to discern how perspectives on an issue as sensitive as what makes a good student teaching placement shape and influence the interaction of the various participants in the dance of teacher preparation. There is no doubt that every role in the student teaching experience is important to the emerging practice of a new teacher. Student teachers themselves know this. “The future teacher,” writes Cruikshank (1977), “attempts to identify and meet expectations which come from self, cooperating teachers, university supervisors, students and society in general” (p. 51). But are these various perspectives inherent in the interactions between
student teachers, cooperating teachers and supervisors, and are there points of agreement in these various perspectives or is each participant starting from a different point of view?

To ascertain answers to our questions, we drew on qualitative research methods for design and analysis of an open-ended questionnaire. One of the major strengths of qualitative research, write Miles and Huberman (1994), is that it is “fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, process and structures of their lives” (p.10). Individuals’ perspectives emerge in qualitative research in response to questions that focus on the assumptions people make about their lives and things that they take for granted (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Rogers, 1984). In our study, we operate from the implicit assumption that perspectives on student teaching placements are shaped not so much by the physical setting as by the ways in which the various participants in the experience interpret their roles in action (Erickson, 1986; Hatch, 1985).

We developed a questionnaire that we hoped would elicit the perspectives of cooperating teachers, student teachers, and supervisors about “good” student teaching placements. Our instrument draws on the research on student teaching described above. Through our inquiry, we sought to extend our understanding of the dynamics of student teaching in an effort to tease out the characteristics of good student teaching placements. Our approach to this issue involved developing open-ended questions about what makes a “good” student teacher, a “good” cooperating teacher, and a “good” supervisor. We think that such questions offer the opportunity to learn from the participants themselves about their perceptions of good student teaching placements through a focus on these roles.

Our analysis of their responses draws on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Using a system of constant comparisons to analyze the data, we developed descriptive categories that capture the perspectives of the participants (here student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university-based supervisors). The responses of each group were analyzed separately by listing, examining, and then categorizing them by theme. For validity, three different readers analyzed each set of responses and their results were compared. Where category designations seemed discrepant, there was discussion that generally led to the reshaping of descriptors. We made the decision to present the data in matrices with numbers of responses in order to make it easier to read and understand participants’ perspectives.

Participants

Our sample is drawn from master’s students in elementary and secondary education programs at Roosevelt University, a private, non-denominational university located on two campuses in Chicago. The teacher programs at Roosevelt serve close to 600 students who are typically first generation college. The majority are racially diverse older adults and career changers. Student teaching is generally the last class that is taken in a 36-hour master’s degree. Supervisors are drawn from
Mari Koerner & Frances O'Connell Rust with Frances Baumgartner

the ranks of full-time faculty and experienced, retired school teachers. Because the university has both a downtown and suburban campus, student teachers can be in either city or suburban schools.

Fifty sets of questionnaires were sent out to master's level student teachers and their cooperating teachers in early childhood, elementary, and secondary teacher education programs at Roosevelt University. Seven university supervisors (100 percent), and twenty-one student teachers and their cooperating teachers responded.

The Questionnaire

Each respondent was asked the following questions:


4. Describe a “good” student teaching placement.

Method

We sorted participants' responses in categories. Thus, for example, all of the cooperating teacher responses were coded as a set. Once this coding was complete, we compared across the three groups. Because our sample was so small, we did not analyze the data relative to the grade level of the respondents. With a larger sample, this could be an interesting expansion of this study. We found that participants' responses about roles sorted along four general themes. In order of frequency these are:

- mentoring/supervision activities on the part of cooperating teachers and supervisors;
- personal characteristics such as patience and good humor;
- pedagogical content knowledge as in “knowing the subject and how to teach it”;
- professional dispositions such as being collegial, or being organized.

There was general consensus among participants on some of these. For example, student teachers, cooperating teachers, and supervisors all agree that
cooperating teachers should be good mentors and supervisors as is evident in the following responses:

Cooperating Teacher: A good cooperating teacher is a mentor. He should knowledgeable and his advice should be trustworthy. (See Table 5)

Student Teacher: A good cooperating teacher will be a mentor and will have good qualities. OR A good cooperating teacher is someone who will let a student teacher fly. They let you try different things and give you feedback on your successes as well as any failures. They are there for you to borrow ideas off of and willing to leave you alone to teach your class. (See Table 5)

Supervisor: A good cooperating teacher will be available for post conferences, ask questions about what they can do to help students, conference with students and offer constructive suggestions. (See Table 5)

There were also areas in which one group's responses were discrepant with those of the other two: For example, student teachers cited personal characteristics as six times more important for cooperating teachers than did cooperating teachers and university supervisors.

Student Teacher: A good cooperating teacher is honest, energetic, and open-minded. OR A good cooperating teacher is caring, concerned, committed. (See Table 10)

We also found that there were differing perceptions of roles. Student teachers, for example, expected more advocacy on their behalf from supervisors than did cooperating teachers.

Student Teacher: A good university supervisor needs to be a liaison between the student teacher and the teaching community comprised of professional teachers.

Cooperating Teacher: A good university supervisor communicates university requirements clearly both to student teachers and cooperating teachers (number of classes to be taught, direction of student teaching, etc.), visits at least 3 to 4 times and does not require a lot of outside work for the student teacher. (See Table 1)

Where category designations seemed discrepant, there was discussion that generally led to the reshaping of descriptors, for example, “Appearance is important. Neatness counts” was interpreted to mean “dresses and acts professionally” (See Table 7) or “Don’t be afraid to fail when planning lessons” was interpreted to mean “Able to make mistakes” (See Table 5).
Findings

We have presented our findings in table format below so that comparisons within categories and across roles can be easily seen. We begin with a consideration of the role of student teacher. We move from there to a focus on the role of cooperating teachers and then to a study of supervisors’ roles. We end this section with a focus on participants’ descriptions of a good student teaching placement.

**The Good Student Teacher:** The responses to question #1 suggest the tensions that exist in a role whose very descriptor, student teacher, implies both compliance and assertiveness. Descriptors of the “good” student teacher were evenly divided across the themes of Professional Attitudes and Dispositions and Personal Qualities. Singly and together, these categories accounted for the majority of descriptors provided by respondents. Among the descriptors that we found most intriguing were those that pointed directly at the student teacher as novice and understudy—“accepting of help & advice” and “able to make mistakes/takes criticism”—and those that focused on the student teacher as budding professional—“innovative/risk taker” and “flexible/open-minded.” Like cooperating teachers and supervisors, they are expected to be “caring” and “reflective,” but there is so much more expected of them—by themselves as well as by those who supervise them. (See Tables 1 & 2)

<p>| Table 1: Professional Attitudes and Dispositions of Student Teachers |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ST (n=21)</th>
<th>CT (n=21)</th>
<th>SUPR (n=7)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

43
**Exploring Roles in Student Teaching Placement**

Table 2: Personal Qualities of Student Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ST (n=21)</th>
<th>CT (n=21)</th>
<th>SUPR (n=7)</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Capable/Competent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>Caring (compassionate, nurturing, concerned with building confidence, empathic, responsive, unselfish)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dedicated/Enthusiastic/Excited/Motivated/Passionate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible (Open-minded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Has stamina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Honest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Intelligent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mature/Strong in mind and spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Modest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Respectful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sense of humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-confident/self-reliant/Takes initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>86</td>
<td></td>
<td>Total Entries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Observable Professional Qualities:** We found in participants’ responses to the question of who is a “good” student teacher a set of descriptors that are in some ways analogous to the mentoring/supervisory activities that they ascribed to cooperating teachers and university supervisors (see Table 5). We have designated these as Observable Professional Qualities (see Table 3). Most have to do with the role of student teacher: They involve emulation of cooperating teacher’s activities or compliance with the general order of school. Coming primarily from student teachers, the descriptor, “tries new methods,” stands out because it breaks with this pattern (See Table 3).
### Table 3: Observable Professional Qualities of Student Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ST (n=21)</th>
<th>CT (n=21)</th>
<th>SUPR (n=7)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Consistent/dependable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dresses and acts professionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Follows coop teacher's lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Follows school district policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Good communication skills/Good people skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Organized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Positive attitude/Enthusiastic about teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Prepared, Keeps up with grading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Punctual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Respects peers and administrators, good rapport with students and staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Teamplayer/Collaborative/Cooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Tries new methods, Interested in new methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Uses high level questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Volunteers for extra assignments, Attends extra-curricular activities, parent confs, staff meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Total Entries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Professional Knowledge Base:** We noted with interest the fact that the descriptors of the professional/pedagogical knowledge base for student teachers were much fuller and more robust than those provided for cooperating teachers. While this category is slim especially in comparison to *professional dispositions* and *personal qualities* (See Tables 1 & 2), it nevertheless provides a more robust picture of the essential understandings that undergird teaching than do the descriptors of cooperating teachers and university supervisors (See Table 4).
Table 4: Professional Knowledge Base of Student Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ST (n=21)</th>
<th>CT (n=21)</th>
<th>SUPR (n=7)</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowledgeable about planning (Clear goals for instruction, Matches content and instruction with students and context, Develops appropriate learning activities)

Knowledgeable about classroom management

Knowledgeable about content

Broad liberal arts background and values education

Knowledgeable about standards/assessment

Knowledgeable about technology

Knowledgeable about child development and the ways in which learning happens

Total entries

"Good" Cooperating Teachers: All participants agree that good cooperating teachers and supervisors are good mentors and role models: They take time with student teachers, share their knowledge of good teaching, and offer support and encouragement. It is interesting to note, however, that within the set of descriptors that together describe the activities of mentors, giving autonomy to student teachers is noted by almost half of the student teachers and cooperating teachers who participated in the study but by only one supervisor. Because autonomy so clearly relates to the student teacher’s role as a beginning teacher, we were intrigued by this anomaly (See Table 5).
Table 5: Mentoring (Supervision) Activities of Cooperating Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ST (n=21)</th>
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<th>SPR (n=7)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Allows student teacher to become involved in all aspects and duties of teaching</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Allows student teacher to try new techniques and activities/Encourages risk-taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gives autonomy: Makes possible for student teacher to take over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good mentor and role model (see descriptors below)</td>
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<td>Available for questions and concerns</td>
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<td>Goes the extra mile</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good mentor and role model</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledgeable about teaching teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Knows when to provide help &amp; support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Observes</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Spends time with student teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shares knowledge of good teaching and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gives positive and constructive feedback on successes &amp; failures, lesson plans, instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Welcoming of student teacher/Prepares students for student teacher’s arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>Total Entries</td>
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</table>

Professional Dispositions & Personal Qualities: *Professional dispositions* comprise the second largest category of responses to our question about good cooperating teachers. While it is interesting to note that none of the characteristics given were mentioned as frequently as were descriptors of mentoring activities for cooperating teachers, it is worth noting that the two descriptors most frequently mentioned: collegiality and openness not only go hand in hand but also are generally acknowledged characteristics of good mentors in any field. Further, though we have separated professional dispositions from personal characteristics because of the ways in which these descriptors were framed in participants’ responses, there is actually very little that suggests that they are not simply qualities that one would want to see in any colleague and particularly in a colleague with whom one is also in a mentoring or supervisory relationship (See Tables 6 & 7).
### Table 6: Professional dispositions of Cooperating Teachers

<table>
<thead>
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<th>CT (n=21)</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Able to let others make mistakes/Able/willing to let go
Collegial/Cooperative/Good communication and interpersonal skills
Commitment to kids (kids come first)
Enthusiastic about teaching, good teacher
Learner
High expectations for students
Non-defensive/Open to learning from student teacher (younger person)/secure
Organized

### Table 7: Personal Qualities of Cooperating Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ST (n=21)</th>
<th>CT (n=21)</th>
<th>SPR (n=7)</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
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<td>36</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Caring/Careful of student teacher's feelings
Energetic
Flexible/Open-minded
Gracious/Patient
Helpful/Supportive
Honest/Trustworthy
Passionate
Perceptive

**Professional Knowledge:** Knowledge comprises the fourth major category of responses to the question about a "good" cooperating teacher. To us, the interesting issue related to this category is that so few of the participants' remarks overall related to ways in which cooperating teachers enact their understandings of teaching and learning as they relate both to their students and to student teachers (See Table 8).
Table 8: Professional Knowledge Base of Cooperating Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ST (n=21)</th>
<th>CT (n=21)</th>
<th>SPR (n=7)</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>49</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Assesses student learning
Consistent
Demonstrates how to teach
Encourages problem-solving
Knowledgeable about child development/children
Knowledgeable about content
Knowledgeable about pedagogy
Total Entries

The Good Student Teaching Supervisor

Mentoring (Supervision) Activities: As was the case with cooperating teachers, mentoring activities comprised the largest set of responses concerning a good student teaching supervisor and the largest subset of responses describe supervisors as coaches, mentors, guides, role models. The emphasis that participants placed on this category with relation to supervisors (see Table 9 below) suggests this is a tacit acknowledgement of the cooperating teachers’ need to focus first on her students and that the priority of the university supervisor should be the education of the student teacher. This subtle sense of priorities came through here in the descriptions of supervisors’ activities and in discussions of supervisors’ professional and personal qualities.

There were in participants’ responses several descriptors of the supervisor’s role that had not figured in the descriptions of cooperating teachers. Chief among these was the perception of the supervisor as a liaison between the university and the school. As such, the supervisor functions as an advocate for the student teacher with regard to the requirements of the teacher education program (See Table 9).
### Table 9: Mentoring (Supervision) Activities of Supervisors

<table>
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<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>16</td>
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</table>

**Address problems quickly**

**Available for regular interaction with student teacher (weekly seminars)**

**Checks with students on student teacher’s progress**

**Acts as Coach, Guide, Mentor, Role Model, Provides support/Understanding**

**Combines supervision with instruction**

**Does not require a lot of outside work**

**Gives good advice re teaching/Provides positive feedback and constructive criticism**

**In synch with coop teacher & school/Does not interfere/argue with curriculum that is currently set up in school**

**Acts as Liaison, Gives feedback to cooperating teachers, Mediator between coop teacher & student teacher (when necessary)**

**Makes sure student teacher is ready for student teaching**

**Observes/Makes scheduled & unscheduled visits to observe student teachers (at least 4 times)**

**Provides reference for future work**

**Total entries**

---

**Professional Dispositions & Personal Qualities:** These themes blend together as they did with the descriptors of cooperating teachers. Like cooperating teachers, university supervisors are expected to be good communicators, but in their role as supervisors, they are expected to be more attuned to the needs of student teachers. Thus, encouragement and caring figure more in the descriptors of supervisors than they do in those of cooperating teachers (See Tables 10 & 11).
Table 10: Professional Dispositions of Supervisors

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Advocate/Believes in student teachers/Willing to fight for student teachers

Collaborative

Good communication skills/Good interpersonal skills/Good listener

Realistic (about expectations of student teachers)
Punctual

Total entries

Table 11: Personal Qualities of Supervisors

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Caring/Compassionate/Empathic/Insightful

Encouraging/Motivating/Helpful/Nurturing/Supportive/Reassuring

Ethical/honest

Flexible

Total entries

Professional Knowledge: We were surprised by the dearth of descriptors that related to supervisors’ pedagogical knowledge because the supervisors were the faculty who often taught the methods classes or they were retired school people—both of whom should have had substantial pedagogical knowledge. Besides the expectation that they should have had teaching experience, there was virtually no mention of knowledge about education, supervision, even adult development (See Table 12).
Table 12: Professional Knowledge Base of Supervisors

<table>
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</tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Knowledgeable about research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Knowledgeable about teaching and schools/ Experienced teacher (10 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Total entries</td>
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Good Student Teaching Placements

Our data on the question of a good student teaching placement were incomplete. We are missing responses from cooperating teachers. However, there are some interesting trends in the responses that we did receive that round out the data provided above and suggest some intriguing insights about the ways in which our respondents view the student teaching experience. Describing a professional climate was the main focus of their responses and within this broad category, a collegial, open, friendly environment was the most critical aspect (See Table 14). We were interested, too, in the allusions to students that a few student teachers and supervisors thought important to include in their descriptions of good student teaching sites (see Table 13) and, it seems to go without saying, that classrooms should be well-equipped (see Table 15).

Table 13: Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Angelic Students</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Small percentage of “at-risk” students/ Good “control” throughout setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Students understand the need for order and discipline</td>
</tr>
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<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Total Entries</td>
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52
### Table 14: Professional Climate

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<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Administrators know and are interested in student teachers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Allows student teacher to teach a preferred grade level</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Close to student teacher’s home (or supervisor’s)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Closely resembles school in which student teacher will eventually work or grow up</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>Collegial—student teacher part of a team/Professional interaction around good teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Encourages and supports creativity &amp; trial of new ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Encourages extra-curricular involvement of student teachers/Involvement in board and faculty meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>Friendly staff/Welcoming &amp; Supportive of student teachers &amp; outsiders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>In synchrony with teacher ed program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Information provided about schedule and other school routines</td>
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<td>Master teacher for student teacher</td>
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<td>Realistic—gives student teacher a genuine sense of the life of schools &amp; classrooms</td>
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<td>Safe environment (physically &amp; emotionally)</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>Welcoming and supportive of student teachers</td>
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### Table 15: Physical Setting

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53
Because the questionnaire was open-ended, we wondered what would happen if we sent out a forced choice questionnaire in which we asked respondents—student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors—to rank the importance of those attributes that we had determined from the open-ended responses. So, we tried it. We developed a questionnaire on which we placed all of the attributes listed above. Next to each quality, we asked respondents to circle a 1, 2, or 3 with one being the lowest and 3 the highest (most important). As we did with the open-ended questionnaire, we asked respondents to take on one another’s roles. For example, a student teacher would respond for herself and then take the role of the cooperating teacher and mark what she thought the cooperating teacher would circle. We hoped there would be perceived differences among the various respondents and that these differences would give us information about how each participant more specifically defined each role. In retrospect, it wasn’t too surprising that almost every respondent to this set of questionnaires marked every response with a “3”! Thus, we could not conclude anything from the data except that the qualities and characteristics that we derived from the open-ended questionnaires seem to be seen as essential by all of the participants.

Discussion

Although we recognized that the urban context might make a difference in clinical placements, we neglected to ask for information about placements from our respondents, thus we are left with a critical question about the relationship between the teacher education program and the context of the student teaching experience. That a good student teaching placement is not just a matter of choosing the “right” classroom seemed obvious to us. What we did not know, however, was whether and to what extent the constellation of student teacher, cooperating teacher, university supervisor, and school setting shapes and influences perspectives on a good student teaching placement. Our work with our Mills colleagues (LaBoskey, & Richert, 1999; LaBoskey, V., Richert, A, & Kroll, L.,2000; LaBoskey, Kroll, & Galguera, 2001) as well as that of Freidus (2000, 2001) and Rust and Bullmaster (2000) suggests that the values of a program, its desired outcomes for student teaching placements, and the context of a placement itself have potentially powerful shaping effects on the ways in which student teaching placements are enacted.

We did not anticipate the complex and highly interactive negotiation of experience that the data of these questionnaires revealed. A good student teaching experience, we discovered, is dynamic. It is constantly changing, constantly challenging—not just for the student teacher but for the other participants as well. Our data seem to indicate that general knowledge of best practices are rarely drawn upon by either the university supervisor or the cooperating teacher. There were obvious opportunities for such exchanges in both one-to-one interactions between cooperating teachers and student teachers and between supervisors and student
teachers. Remarkably, such exchanges were not even reported in the weekly student teaching seminars that so closely resemble traditional college classes. It may be that the way in which our questions were posed contributed to the imbalance in this category or it may be that the research-based knowledge of teacher education is absent from the discourse around field-based practice.

We are surprised by the clear demarcation of roles that emerged here: Cooperating teachers are acknowledged first as teachers of children and second as teacher educators. Our participants did not expect cooperating teachers to do more than make the classroom accessible to student teachers and work with them in collegial, supportive ways. That cooperating teachers should be mentors and role models is axiomatic to their status as cooperating teachers, and, now that we have combed through this data, we would contend that the accent in this descriptor should be on role model, i.e., cooperating teacher as role model. Mentoring, however, belongs primarily to the university supervisor who, our data suggest, are seen by both student teachers and cooperating teachers as liaisons in the student teaching experience. As liaisons, supervisors could influence the development of new teachers and the practice of experienced teachers in powerful ways. Yet, our own experience as teachers and teacher educators and the data of this study suggests that supervisors rarely interpret their role thus.

The concern for autonomy among student teachers and cooperating teachers and its seeming absence from discourse of the university supervisors moved us to wonder if it is a subtle artifact of classroom knowledge that escapes many supervisors because of their separation from daily classroom life. The issue of autonomy sensitized us to an interesting split that exists in student teachers’ conceptions of themselves as student teachers: On the one hand, they act as students and many of them take a passive role in the classroom following cooperating teachers’ directives and trying to fulfill the requirements of the teacher education program; on the other hand, they are trying to take on professionals’ trappings. Thus, they want to “run the class,” “try new ideas,” “take risks,” and be treated as a colleague, engaged in planning, and making decisions about the conduct of lessons. This split conception of the student teaching role extends to descriptors of a good student teaching placement raising the importance of the psychological climate that characterizes the setting. Student teachers need to feel a part of the school and like members of the professional corps.

Implications

Though too small to warrant generalizations, our study could prompt teacher educators to look beyond relationships and day-to-day supervision to a deeper analysis of the linkages between teacher education programs and the field for the purpose of improving student learning. What we have discovered from our work with this small sample of student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university
supervisors is intriguing enough to move us to explore some of the following issues in greater depth.

- What is the research-based knowledge that is discussed among student teachers, cooperating teachers, and supervisors?
- How might supervisors, cooperating teachers, and student teachers get to know about the program, its goals, and its content?
- How might teacher education programs plan for and implement uniformly "good" student teaching placements for their students?

While we acknowledge the importance of craft in teaching, this study makes clear that pushing beyond craft requires a higher level of discourse about practice. Relationships are important for developing trust and establishing confidence and effective communication, but a general re-shaping of teaching practices will require an explicit commitment on the part of teacher educators to raise the level of discourse within their programs through shared professional development with cooperating teachers and university supervisors. These data suggest that we have focused almost entirely on establishing, improving, and buttressing the individual triads of student teaching. But, if teaching is to change, then a focused conversation about general practice much like that described by Lewis and Tsuchida (1997) and Stiegler and Hiebert (1999) regarding lesson study is essential.

References


Exploring Roles in Student Teaching Placement


Beyond Traditional Structures of Student Teaching

By Ken Zeichner

In this set of papers, we have an analysis and discussion of many issues concerning student teacher learning during the practicum. These papers represent a variety of contexts: preservice programs at New York University (NYU), Mills College, and Roosevelt University (all relatively small programs), and the University of Haifa. The papers also represent a variety of methodologies that have been used to address the question of what makes a good placement setting: surveys of student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors; interviews with mentors and preservice and inservice teachers; and analyses of student teacher journals.

On the one hand, I agree with much of what is asserted in the papers: (1) Student teaching is a critical aspect of preservice teacher education and cooperating teachers are key participants in determining the quality of learning for student teachers. (2) Being a good cooperating teacher is important but is not synonymous with being a good teacher. Being a good cooperating teacher is more than providing access to a classroom or modeling a particular version of good practice. It involves active mentoring. (3) Learning to be a good mentor is a complex and demanding process. (4) The quality of human relationships is important to the making of a good student teaching placement. Specifically, the importance of a safe and supportive environment where student teachers feel able to take risks and explore

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options is stressed in the papers. It is important to consider the compatibility of the teaching enacted in the placement setting with that which is advocated in the rest of the teacher education curriculum. The Mills paper also discusses the possibility of compatibility and familiarity acting as a barrier to teacher learning, a point of view that makes a lot of sense to me.

**Limitations of the Traditional Structure of Student Teaching**

While I agree with many of the arguments made in these papers, I also think that they take for granted in many ways the current dominant situation for student teaching in many teacher education institutions throughout the world, a very problematic situation in terms of what we know about its effects on teacher learning (Zeichner, 1996).

In this traditional model, student teaching and teacher education generally have been and continue to be low status activities in colleges and universities that are under resourced in relation to the complexity of the work to be done (Goodlad, 1990; Darling-Hammond, 1999). There is clear documentation that teacher education has often been used as a “cash cow in research universities to fund higher status activities and of inequitable teaching loads and faculty salaries among those who do the work of teacher education and those who do not (e.g., Tom, 1997; Zeichner, in press). It has even been argued that there is an inverse relationship between one’s closeness to work with schools and teacher education and one’s status in the academy (Lanier & Little, 1986).

There is also clear evidence that mentoring student teachers is not often valued as an important activity either in schools or universities. This is demonstrated by the lack of preparation and support for the work, the temporary and marginal status of those who do the work in universities, and the lack of incentives and rewards for doing a good job. Liston (1995) has referred to teacher education as the domestic labor of colleges and universities, the invisible, under appreciated “keeping house” work that enables others to engage in the more high status work of teaching doctoral students and conducting research. Student teaching and practicum supervision is treated as overload by some colleges and universities (something to be done in addition to a full teaching load) and is often carried out by temporary staff (e.g., retired teachers, graduate students, academic staff) who have little connection to or authority in the rest of the teacher education program. Finally, cooperating teachers usually assume responsibility for mentoring prospective teachers in addition to a full teaching load, often receiving very meager compensation in relation to the work that they do.

Even in programs where much faculty time and energy is put into the teacher education program, like the ones represented in this symposium, these problems are evident. For example, in the NYU paper we are told:
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We continue to employ antiquated methods of reimbursing cooperating teachers: tuition remission, which we know less than 1/3 of our cooperating teachers can use. In other words, 2/3 of our cooperating teachers receive nothing for their work with us. Our supervisors are among the lowest paid in the city. (Reich, 1999, p.6)

Also, with regard to the Mills program we are told:

The majority of the supervision is done by part-time associates who are not supported particularly well in their learning of the program principles, and not compensated well for their critically important work. (LaBoskey & Richert, 1999 p.42)

While there is some discussion in these papers about the need to provide better conditions for university and school-based teacher educators to do the important work of mentoring prospective teachers, it is not emphasized. Good human relations and the importance of the compatibility of philosophies receives much more attention than the material context in which the work is done.

There is often a huge disconnect between the campus-based portion of teacher education programs and student teaching. Cooperating teachers and university instructors are often mutually ignorant of each other's work and the principles that underlie it. These papers discuss the importance of the compatibility of the student teaching placements with the principles of good teaching that are taught in campus courses and/or underlie the program. The main message that I get from them about the meaning of "compatibility" reinforces the view of a "theory into practice" model which posits that student teachers learn theory in the university and apply and enact it in the schools. This view places school-based teacher educators in a secondary role in the teacher education program and undervalues the importance of practitioner knowledge in the process of learning to teach.

Using compatibility as a criterion for determining student teaching placements raises a number of sticky issues. I will briefly mention two of them here. First, all of the programs described in this set of papers are relatively small. It is probably not possible to find philosophically compatible student teaching placements for all student teachers in many of the very large teacher education programs that must place hundreds of student teachers each year. Another very difficult issue with the compatibility goal is concerned with urban teacher education, the emphasis in this symposium. Specifically, if we only look at how well particular settings currently match what is advocated in campus teacher education courses, then many classrooms in large urban districts, often in close proximity to universities, would not be used as student teaching placement sites. We have recently experienced a major positive development in American teacher education where many of the urban universities in the U.S. that formerly placed student teachers only in middle class to upper middle class suburbs have recommitted themselves to public urban education and have begun to reestablish teacher education connections with the public schools in our cities. Compatibility as the major criterion for selecting placement sites would undermine this new commitment to urban public schooling,
and would work against the urgent need to prepare teachers who want to teach in urban schools and who can be successful there.

LaBoskey & Richert (1999) provide us with a way to think about and deal with this issue. They argue that the important thing to consider in thinking about classroom placement sites is whether the teachers in those classrooms are learners, questioning and examining their practices, and continually seeking to improve their practices. This line of argument suggests that rather than looking for classrooms that model the specific teaching practices advocated in campus courses, we look for classrooms where the school culture encourages inquiry and reflection about teaching among the staff and where teachers are working on their practice to make it better. This approach recognizes the importance influence of school culture on teacher practices and enables us to act on our commitment to improve public education in the areas that are currently in the most need of improvement. The question that we should be asking ourselves is what are we doing to help make classrooms better places for teacher and student learning, not just how compatible with our philosophies currently are.

Breaking Out of the Box

of the Traditional Student Teaching Model

In my view, the issue of a good student teaching placement requires that we break outside of the traditional structures of student teaching that have been with us for many years and think in new ways about how schools and universities should relate to each other in the initial and continuing education of teachers. For example, the papers in this set focus on the individual classroom as the placement site and on individual cooperating teachers and supervisors as the mentors of student teachers. We need to think more broadly about schools and communities as places for learning to teach and not just about individual classrooms. Some of what is going on in the current professional development school movement represents a break from the patterns that we have relied on for many years (e.g., Levine & Trachtman, 1996). For example, some of the recently created professional development school or professional practice school partnerships have included the following elements:

(1) Whole schools are often viewed as the placement site and teacher education students work with a variety staff during the course of a student teaching experience.

(2) Community field experiences as part of student teaching are becoming more common and there is an increased emphasis on teaching prospective teachers how to learn about and build upon the cultural resources that pupils bring to school.

(3) University supervisors are not always removed from the school situation
as they have been in the past. There has been an increase in the use of school-based university supervisors and of methods courses taught in schools.

(4) Cooperating teachers and other school staff are assuming more significant roles in relation to the entire teacher education curriculum (e.g., team teaching courses, participating in admissions decisions and program development) and there is greater recognition of and respect for practitioner knowledge in the teacher education curriculum.

In my view, the place that we need to start is by prioritizing teacher education as a major responsibility of schools, colleges, and departments of education and of whole institutions and by putting resources and reward structures into place that are consistent with this emphasis. This would include such things as giving load credit to faculty for work in schools including student teacher supervision, establishing reward systems that value good work done in these areas, better connecting of student teaching to the rest of the teacher education curriculum and integrating clinical faculty and staff into the mainstream of programs, funding innovative work in student teaching on hard money and moving away from the reliance on temporary grants that has plagued many professional development schools. We also need to continue current efforts to involve cooperating teachers as full partners in our teacher education programs and stop treating them as second-class citizens who only provide places for our students to teach. All of this work will require a great deal of time and effort by those of us located in colleges and universities. It is not so much a matter of finding good student teaching placement sites as it is of working to develop them.

I’ve come to the conclusion that not much more can be done in addressing the enduring problems of learning to teach during student teaching within the current dominant structures. I am struck by how similar the problems are today to when I began as a teacher educator in the 1970s. We have been struggling with the same problems for many years. All of the proposals in this set of papers about the importance of the relationships between student teachers, cooperating teachers and university supervisors, supporting the active mentoring of student teachers, improving the connections between the university teacher education curriculum and the school curriculum, etc. depend upon our ability to deal with the issues associated with the larger context of teacher education in colleges and universities. Unless we take a broader perspective on the question of determining good student teaching placements than we have to date, the enduring problems of student teaching will be with us for a long time to come.

In her keynote address at the 1999 national meeting of the Holmes Partnership, Nancy Zimnpher, the Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, urged teacher educators to begin to demand the resources that are needed to support teacher education programs as we know they should be run. She argued that business schools, engineering schools, law schools, medical schools and so on have been successfully making their cases at the campus level for many years, but that teacher
Beyond Traditional Structures of Student Teaching

educators have passively settled for a share of what has been left over. As accountability demands on teacher education programs continue to increase and we are beginning to hear calls for evidence that what we do in preservice teacher education programs makes a difference in terms of the quality of student learning in the classrooms of our program graduates, it is especially important that we finally begin to challenge and change the marginal position of teacher education in colleges and universities. There are recent signs that some university presidents and chancellors have affirmed the importance to the entire university of high quality teacher education programs (e.g., American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 1999). We need to continue to make the case at the highest levels of our institutions for the resources needed to run high quality student teaching experiences and teacher education programs. Until we have won this battle, high quality student teaching placements will continue to be a matter of good fortune rather than the norm.

Note

Much of what has emerged in this reform movement however, represents a repackaging and renaming of the same old practices without fundamental changes in university-school power relationships.

References

Teacher Education Faculty as Supervisors/Advisors/Facilitators: Playing Multiple Roles in the Construction of Field Work Experiences

By Helen Freidus

As we enter the new millennium, controversy rages about the best ways to prepare teachers and literacy specialists to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse world of learners. It is clear that broader-based, context sensitive models of teaching and teacher education are needed, but these are yet to be identified. Recognizing the need to take up the gauntlet, the Bank Street College Reading and Literacy Program is currently examining its practices and challenging the assumptions on which they are based. Given the overwhelming evidence that field experiences play a crucial role in the preparation of teachers (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990), it makes sense for any self-study by a program of teacher education to include a consideration of field experience. Such consideration is particularly relevant at Bank Street where advisement, the year of supervised field experience, is seen as the heart of the teacher preparation process.

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The Bank Street Reading/Literacy Program was started in 1980 when the certification category was first offered by New York State. The program has grown and evolved since then in response to changing needs and a changing population. In the first year, only three students participated in field work; today, 24 men and women are in field placements. Origi-
The program served only pre-service teachers; today, the program offers credentials to pre-service and in-service teachers at both the Masters and post-Masters level of preparation. Over time, we have come to understand better the complex needs and interests of both our students and the students they serve. Our challenge is to find effective ways of addressing these needs and interests.

In 1916, Bank Street founder, Lucy Sprague Mitchell called for ongoing “flexibility when confronted with change and an ability to relinquish patterns that no longer fit the present.” Later, she wrote:

> We are not interested in perpetuating any special “school of thought.” Rather, we are interested in imbuing teachers with an experimental, critical and ardent approach to their work. If we accomplish this, we are ready to leave the future of education to them. (Mitchell, in Antler, 309)

Our goal is to improve our ability to identify and respond to changing conditions within our own graduate school, the schools we serve, and the community at large. Hence, this article focuses on the vision of student teaching in the Bank Street College Reading and Literacy Program and the role of the advisor (supervisor) in this process.

### Method

The methods of study that we have chosen for this inquiry are qualitative in design and selected to provide a case study of supervision within a teacher education program in which teachers are prepared to be literacy leaders and specialists. They include

- surveys comprised of open-ended questions administered in 1996-1997 to 150 alumnae of the Bank Street Reading and Literacy Program;
- mid-year and end-of-the-year written feedback forms completed by students during their years of supervised fieldwork between 1996-2000;
- field notes from monthly conferences between students and advisors during those same years;
- conversations held within the context of weekly conference groups that take place throughout the fieldwork year.

The data were scanned on an ongoing basis to seek out continuities, consistencies, and recurrent patterns, and to identify common themes. Through a process of ongoing reference to the literature in the fields of teacher development and literacy and constant comparison of data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), emergent categories were identified. Data were then scanned once more and coded according to emergent categories. The comparison of survey responses, feedback forms, individual conferences and conference group data provided a means of triangulation of data (Miles...
The narrative quality of the data, especially the feedback forms and notes from weekly and monthly conversations has provided a context for written and oral responses. As a result, our data has proven to be both “thick” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and nuanced (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Supervised Field Work at Bank Street: The “Advisement” Model

Strongly influenced by Dewey’s writings, Bank Street seeks to emphasize the individuality of each learner as well as the need for community building. The college tries to provide its graduates with the kinds of experiences that it is hoped they will provide for their students. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the advisement process, the year of supervised field work that is required in all Bank Street programs.

Advisement includes a number of traditional components of field work: classroom observations by faculty supervisors called “advisors”, individual conferences between advisors and student teachers, three way conferences with cooperating teachers for pre-service students and with administrators for in-service teachers. In each of these components, a dialogical model supplants the traditional “banking” structures of education (Freire, 1984).

Conferences

The year-long relationship between student and advisor provides many opportunities for exploring issues from diverse perspectives. Advisors meet twice monthly with their advisees in regularly scheduled individual conferences. These take two forms; the goal of each is the development of reflective practice. The first is an individual conference in which discussion is related to a student’s interests, observations, and concerns. The conference is designed to provide a safe forum for exploring and linking personal and professional issues and concerns. It is considered to be a time for building relationships between advisor and student and establishing the kind of trust that promotes risk taking and exploration.

The second is a post-observation conference directly related to classroom issues. The conference is designed to follow a classroom visit and may include a cooperating or supervising administrator. Here, too, trust building is an essential component. Post-observations conferences do not incorporate checklists or other frequently administered formal evaluation tools. The goal of these conferences is to move the locus of critique from advisor to student. For this reason, conferences almost invariably begin with an advisor saying: “What did you think? How did you feel the lesson went?” Through the conversations that ensue, students are encouraged to articulate their intended goals, reflect on the design and implementation of their lessons, and consider the ways in which the lessons were successful and/or unsuccessful. Advisors / supervisors facilitate analysis by posing a series of probing
questions designed to scaffold the student's process of self-critique. The focus of these conferences is not on whether a lesson is good or bad, but on what works and why. The following excerpt provides an example of the commonly held post-observation protocol among Bank Street advisors:

I ask my students, "What were you thinking of at such and such time? In responding to this, they become aware that they were making a decision at that time and at hundreds of other times a day.... I then remind them that what they decide is not as important as their awareness that a decision has to be made. They need to be able to think on their feet, make a reasonable choice, and articulate this choice. If it is the "wrong" choice, the lesson will not work well; they will learn from experience how to do it better the next time. So, there really is no wrong choice. (Rice, 2000)

In addition to the dyadic conference structures described above, the advisement process includes a third interactive format: the conference group. Conference group is a weekly seminar in which each faculty advisor meets together with his or her five to seven advisees. In these seminars, students engage in extended conversations about past and present classroom experiences. The faculty advisor's role in this process is that of facilitator.

In the Reading and Literacy program, groups are composed of both Masters and Post-Masters candidates. We find that these mixed groups enable new teachers to pose important questions, questions that encourage veterans to reflect upon, explain, and question their own practice. Often, veteran teachers tell stories and pose questions that compel new teachers to examine their emerging beliefs and practices. Supervision becomes a collaborative experience as participants reflect upon and critique their own work as well as that of their colleagues. In so doing, they begin to assume responsibility for their own professional development and they become resources in the professional development of their peers.

The goals of the advisement (supervision) process are to help teachers to understand and engage in: (1) teaching that is well informed by theory and research, (2) teaching that is not only systematic but reflective and mindful as well, and (3) teaching that makes a contribution toward social change. According to Cambourne (1999), systematic teaching is that which is carefully planned. The systematic teacher can explain in confident and coherent ways why he or she chooses specific teaching/learning activities and processes and how such activities facilitate their students' learning. However, Cambourne points out that systematic teaching is not always learner centered. One can be systematic by having a thorough knowledge of materials and past teaching/learning experiences. Teachers can provide articulate rationales for their practice and still fail to take into account the strengths, needs, interests, and "funds of knowledge" (Moll & Greenberg, 1990) of the children that they are currently teaching.
To reach each child’s potential, teachers, according to Cambourne, must be reflective and mindful as well as systematic. Mindfulness is directly related to how teachers take in information. Reflection and mindfulness require a critical stance (Cambourne, 1999). Teachers who have learned their strategies and skills—even their philosophy—through a “banking” model (Freire, 1984) are unlikely to be able to engage mindfully with their own students. Their instructional responses, although carefully planned, may be invariant and lacking in context specific nuance. The instruction they choose may make sense to them but not necessarily to the learners with whom they work.

Many of the students who come to Bank Street have received much of their previous schooling through a variety of transmission models. They are unaccustomed to an interactive, learner-centered model of teaching and learning. By having one faculty member serve as advisor, supervisor, and facilitator throughout the fieldwork year, it is often possible to raise questions over time, stimulate cognitive dissonance, and help students to identify and engage in practice that is increasingly learner-centered and grounded in theory. The multiple roles played by faculty members provide pervasive forums for exploring the connections between theory, practice, and personal experience. At its best, this process helps students to become reflective and mindful as well as systematic. When this happens, teachers are more likely to engage in the kinds of practice that lead to social change which is and has always been an articulated goal of teacher education at Bank Street (Antler, 1987).

From the beginning, advisement has been designed to help teachers develop the habits of mind and habits of instruction that make such change possible (Nager & Shapiro, 2000). The charge of advisors in the Reading and Literacy Program, therefore, is to help teachers develop a repertoire of assessment and instructional strategies that enable all children not only to become readers and writers but also to become critical readers and critical thinkers. In the world of literacy classrooms where “best practice” is a much contested subject, where instruction is often linked to standardized testing models that have remained substantially unchanged over the past 80 years, and where mandated assessment and/or instructional models often impede rather than facilitate culturally responsive teaching (Willis & Harris, 2000), advisors face a daunting challenge.

The Field

In the beginning, fieldwork in the Reading and Literacy Program, as in all Bank Street programs, was designed as an apprenticeship model. Preservice students were placed in progressive independent schools under the tutelage of seasoned cooperating teachers. In these sites, cooperating teachers, school administrators, and college advisors/supervisors shared common visions of education and valued common practices. As a result, little explicit instruction was needed. Since cohesive models of learner-centered practice were understood to be pervasive throughout the
schools, pre-service teachers were immersed in a world of “good” practice. The advisor/supervisor’s job was to encourage his or her students to look critically at what they were seeing and doing, to reflect, and to make connections between the world of these classrooms and their own personal and professional experiences.

Over the past twenty years, however, the number of students seeking certification in Reading and Literacy has expanded while the number of progressive independent schools has diminished. Moreover, in the past twenty years, the College has made an increasing commitment to public education in under-resourced schools. Consequently, not every student can be placed in a classroom that matches the kinds of educational practice espoused in courses and readings. As the schools in which students are placed serve more and more diverse learners, it is becoming increasingly clear that there is no one pedagogical model that meets the needs of all learners. Today’s teachers need to develop a much broader understanding of literacy practices. They must find ways to remain true to their fundamental values of learner-centered teaching while meaningfully incorporating a broader range of instructional strategies.

In today’s world, cooperating teachers, administrators, supervisors, and student teachers struggle together to identify and implement literacy programs that meet the needs of all learners. These realities alter the possibility of implementing a true apprenticeship model, and they raise new questions about what constitutes effective supervision for Bank Street student teachers:

If the aim of teacher education, is a reformed practice that is not readily available, and if there is no reinforcing culture to support such practice, then the basic imagery of apprenticeship seems to break down. . . . [This] creates a puzzle for reform. Through what activities and situations do teachers learn new practices that may not be routinely reinforced in the work situation. (Sykes & Bird in Putnam & Borko, 2000, p.8)

There is endless controversy in the field about the ways in which student teaching should be organized. What best prepares teachers to meet the challenges they will face in today’s urban schools: models of effective teaching or experience in extremely challenging classrooms (Watts, 1987; Zeichner, 1987). At Bank Street, the faculty are consistent in the belief that good models are essential for the preparation of good teachers. Without a concrete vision of what is possible, teachers are left to engage in isolated struggles to identify practices that support their beliefs and their goals. However, as we move away from the apprenticeship model, we are left with some uncertainty about what constitutes “good” models and what roles supervisors/advisors should play in helping students to become effective teachers.

Developing New Models

As advisors/supervisors in the field of reading and literacy, many of us hold personal and professional predilections for the Deweyan practices that have held
us in good stead for so many years. And yet, we are now finding that there are times and places when these do not suffice to meet the literacy needs of all students. Whereas Bank Street has traditionally viewed good practice and social change as interrelated goals, in many schools, these are seen as distinctly different issues. How do we move on in ways that meet the needs of all constituents?

Behavioral approaches to reading, phonics oriented instruction, even the highly structured guided reading practices that are currently dominant in many New York City schools do not in themselves help children to develop habits of critical thinking. They do not provide the kinds of experiences that will prepare them to participate effectively in a democratic society. However, they do help many children to become effective decoders and basic comprehenders of written language. These skills are essential. Our teachers need to be well versed in all methods that support such development. Yet, we are not willing to say that these accomplishments are enough.

Thus, we, as advisors/supervisors, are seeking to “move on.” Leaving behind the discourse of the familiar, we are seeking new habits of mind, new strategies, and new skills that will enable us to prepare our students to prepare their students. For this purpose, the surveys we administered to alumnae and the evaluation/feedback forms completed by students over the course of the past five years are proving to be important data sources. Asking what have they found or do they find most valuable in their fieldwork experience, we learn that alumni and student teachers consistently value advisors'/supervisors’ willingness to model instructional practices. However, they also value faculty willingness to allow students to figure things out for themselves and to make their own decisions about materials and practices. The following response is representative of many.

My advisor helped me to become a more reflective person and teacher by giving suggestions and modeling, but she also let me figure things out by questioning, thinking, discussing, taking risks. This has helped me to think more about the kids I work with; where they are, what support they need, what goals to set. (evaluation/feedback form, 1999)

Across the data sources, teachers speak of the value they place on advisors’ abilities to help them to understand, negotiate, and—ultimately—appreciate different kinds of instructional practices.

My advisor helped me to navigate and negotiate the more traditional framework of the third grade in which I was doing my fieldwork....Years later I came to understand how valuable this experience was. (Alumnae questionnaire, 2000)

In addition, past and current students consistently referred to the ways in which advisors helped them to integrate their personal and professional concerns.

Her focus and her knowledge were so important. But she always managed to listen to the “whole me” and what “I” was bringing to the work. (Alumni survey, 1997).
Thus we feel affirmed that the basic premises of the advisement process developed over the years remain valid. The year long opportunity for faculty and students to work together, the ability of faculty to assume multiple roles (advisor, supervisor, facilitator), and the pervasive scaffolding of reflective practice throughout the fieldwork experience continue to be important components of teacher education at Bank Street. However, more is needed and questions remain: How do we preserve these behaviors while pushing at the boundaries of our roles, expanding our knowledge base and increasing our ability to identify advisement/supervision strategies that are more comprehensive? How do we encourage our students to value what they have accomplished but work on an ongoing basis to extend their perspectives and their repertoire of instructional strategies?

The data provides us with a point of departure for this effort. If we apply a synectic process\(^1\) to the findings, we may be able to broaden our definitions of the roles advisors / supervisors can and should play. Analogies that seem helpful include: prospector, dramaturge, negotiator, and coach. The responsibilities of each of these figures can help us to define and redefine effective supervision.

Adviser as Prospector

As prospector, the advisor/supervisor observes, listens to, and mines what the student brings. Educationally, this role draws upon the Froebelian concept that “The purpose of teaching and instruction is to bring ever more out of man rather than to put more and more into man” (Froebel, 1889, p. 279 in Weber, 1969). The supervisor’s role is to create opportunities for the students to demonstrate and expand their ongoing knowledge of the many facets of literacy instruction. In creating these learning opportunities, the supervisor/advisor models learner centered practice, the honoring of diverse experiences, and the integration of personal and professional pools of knowledge.

It is the role of prospector that, in keeping with the vision of Froebel and Plato before him, allows the advisor/supervisor to demonstrate his or her belief in the potential that lies within each fieldwork student. Advisors / supervisors as prospector encourage fieldwork students to take risks, to figure things out, to show how much they know. It is in the role of prospector that the supervisor asks, “What do you want to learn? How do you intend to meet your goals?” In order to do this in more effective ways, it is the responsibility of the supervisor/advisor, as Prospector, to become ever more skilled at identifying the experiences and skills that comprise the valuable cultural and cognitive ore brought to classrooms by a more diverse population of fieldwork students.

Adviser as Dramaturge

A second useful analogy is that of dramaturge. In the world of the theater, a dramaturge is a dramatic production’s historian and historiographer. It is his or her role to provide information on either or both: (1) the context in which the play has
been set, e.g. what and how did people really eat in seventeenth century France or (2) the text's history in terms of how it may have been intended, produced, and interpreted at the time of its original showing as well as in subsequent times.

The supervisor/advisor as dramaturge brings his or her knowledge of the field. He or she supplements students’ information about pedagogy by identifying models that have been successfully used in the field of literacy, explaining how and why they were developed, clarifying the fine points of these models, and helping students to match student needs with appropriate instructional models. The dramaturge does not tell actors or directors how to use the information but extends their understanding of what has been and what might be. Likewise, advisors/supervisors in the Reading and Literacy program do not tell their student teachers which strategies will be most effective. Instead, they offer information and then support the student teacher in his or her efforts to figure out what will work and why. As dramaturge, the reading and literature supervisor/advisor is challenged to put aside pre-existing biases regarding “best practice,” deepen his or her own knowledge base of pedagogical strategies, become more conversant about the contexts within which particular strategies are most effective, and identify models in which pedagogies have been combined in order to preserve broader based educational goals.

Advisor as Coach

Going hand in hand with the role of dramaturge is the role of supervisor/advisor as coach. It is oft repeated that supervisors and teachers, like coaches, support and scaffold the growth and development of the learners with whom they work. However, athletic coaches do one thing that few supervisors and few teachers do: they tell it as it is. Good coaches, according to Grant Wiggins (2000), do not hedge. Good coaches are fair; they praise learners’ accomplishments. However, they are also honest. They let learners know what the mark is, where they stand in relation to that mark, and what they have to do in order to come closer. If the learners’ efforts have not taken them where they need to be—no matter how great the effort has been or how significant the accomplishment—the progress is honored but the remaining disparity is made clear.

We are discovering that effective supervisors/advisors like effective coaches help student teachers to recognize not only what they know but what they need to learn and/or to practice. This responsibility is particularly challenging for many advisors/supervisors. It involves giving close scrutiny to and challenging many of the beliefs and practices that have become safe and comfortable. That is not to say the beliefs and practices are not rightly valued, but that they have some unanticipated, complicating implications. For example, many advisors/supervisors pride themselves on being “nurturing”; “nurturing”, they define, as emphasizing the positive, avoiding the negative. It is often difficult to be both nurturing and candid.

Secondly, advisors/supervisors at Bank Street, build on a tradition of inquiry. Steeped in this pedagogy, we have a tendency to avoid direct instruction. In so
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doing, it is possible that we may overgeneralize the discovery process. Desiring that students construct their own visions of effective practice, advisors/supervisors are often hesitant to give direct instructions. Frequently this instructional “space” does enable students to figure things out as testified to in our data sources. However, there are times when this practice leaves students floundering without the skills they need to meet their own goals.

Thirdly, believing that the learning process should be collaborative and generative, advisors/supervisors eschew traditional supervisory tools such as checklists. Instead, a process of observation and recording is used as a basis for post observation conferences. In many ways, this process works well in the context of institutional goals. However, it means that feedback may be somewhat idiosyncratic, not always incorporating a vocabulary that is common throughout course experiences, readings, and/or other facets of the teacher education program. The absence of clear and consistent terminology was less important when students were being enculturated into a world of shared belief systems and shared practices through the aforementioned apprenticeship models (Putnam & Borko, 2000). However, as the students and teachers with whom we work become more diverse, there can be less certainty that implicit meaning is shared meaning. In the complexities of today’s world, it is essential that teachers and students have an accurate sense of where they stand in relation to the goals they set. As coaches, the supervisory challenge is not only to generate probing questions but to find mechanisms that facilitate clarity of communication.

Advisor as Negotiator

Finally, we can make an analogy between the role of the advisor/supervisor and that of Negotiator. Martha Nussbaum speaks of the need for each member of a diverse society to be willing “to doubt the goodness of one’s own way” (Nussbaum, 1997, p62). However, sometimes one or both parties are unwilling to engage in the doubting process. Sometimes the cooperating teacher or the student teacher passionately believes that there is only one possible way to help children become literate members of society. The cooperating teacher may refuse to provide the student teacher with time and space to experiment with different approaches. The student teacher, newly developing an understanding of progressive pedagogy, may be resistant to exploring more traditional strategies used in many classrooms. Conversely, student teachers who are committed to models of direct teaching may be unable to identify, respect, and learn to incorporate the more hidden structures of a progressive classroom.

In these instances, it is the responsibility of the advisor/supervisor to don the hat of negotiator, a person who, according to the Random House unabridged dictionary, “moves through, around, or over in a satisfactory manner” (1966, p957). The advisor/supervisor first endeavors to facilitate dialogue between the teacher and cooperating teacher, dialogue that engenders in each participant respect for and
understanding of the beliefs and practices of the other. Sometimes, however, this outcome cannot be achieved; then the advisor/supervisor works to circumvent the impasse. In the first case, he or she works to carve out space for the student teacher to have meaningful teaching experiences. In the latter, he or she negotiates between the student teacher’s current thinking and the existing classroom practices. As the scope of fieldwork placements becomes broader, advisors/supervisors will be required to become increasingly adept at “working” the situation.

**Conclusion**

Together, these roles contribute to the development of a consistent, cohesive support system for supporting progressive teachers seeking to apply their knowledge and beliefs in the context of today’s classrooms. In each of these roles advisors/supervisors help students to reflect on their own practice, to know what they know, and to identify what they need to learn. However, what differentiates these advisement behaviors from past ones is that they are more conscious and more systematic.

In all of these, the conference group, the weekly seminar of fieldwork students, plays an important role facilitating advisors'/supervisors' ability to develop an appropriate balance between presenting information and supporting student teachers' construction of knowledge (Putnam & Borko, 2000). Working together, the conference group creates a mini-discourse community in which fieldwork students support, question, and—in essence—supervise each other. Through this collective process of advisement/supervision, members of the group contribute to their colleagues’ construction of the role of literacy teacher as they struggle to construct their own vision and pedagogy. And, as they do so their questions and comments help advisors/supervisors to pose new questions, to gather new information, and ultimately to broaden their own perspectives. Added to the roles of the faculty member as supervisor, advisor, facilitator is one other—colleague and co-constructor of knowledge. Thus, the successful conference group parallels the successful classroom in which teachers and students learn with and through each other. Ultimately, the success of field experience as a medium for effecting a bridge between the Reading and Literacy Program and the complex worlds of classrooms and schools depends on the ability of the advisor/supervisor/facilitator to scaffold the teacher’s learning in ways that enable interpretation and reinterpretation that draws on the learner’s experience and developing understandings of other perspectives.

**Note**

1 Synectics refers to a brainstorming process developed by Gordon in which similes are used to broaden one’s understandings and perceptions of the targeted term. In this case, the sentence prompt would be ‘A supervisor is like ______.’
References


New Questions about Student Teaching

By Christopher M. Clark

Many of the difficulties we face in doing a good job with supervision of student teachers stem from the fact that there is so much to listen to—simultaneous messages, conflicting messages, signal and noise mixed together, all under the pressure of time. It’s a wonder that anything “good” gets done. Yet the reports in this theme issue are radically encouraging. Good learning from field experiences is clearly possible, even under imperfect conditions. Such good learning is clearly not easy to support nor automatic. But it is possible.

The reports in this theme issue remind me of a more ancient kind of literature—the literature called “the hero’s journey.” In the hero’s journey, the main character, full of youthful optimism and a bit of magic, sets out on a quest to locate and bring home a precious and powerful object—a holy grail, a magic sword or ring, a book of secrets. In this case, a powerful and thoughtful band of teacher educators set out to the east, to the north, and to the west to discover, describe, and tame the good student teaching placement, and bring it back to the castle keep, for all teacher educators to appreciate.

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In the classic literature of the quest, the middle part of the journey is usually full of pain, danger, uncertainty and disillusionment. The optimistic plans made back home do not work out as envisioned. Dragons bar the way. The object of the quest becomes much more complex, dangerous, and difficult to deal with as the heroes and heroines close in on it. And
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those on the quest are themselves transformed by the journey, sometimes in painful and surprising ways.

Now, I don’t know whether these authors encountered any dragons out there, but I do think that what they brought back is a more complicated and dilemma-filled representation of the good student teaching placement. And I think that each of these teacher educators has been changed to some degree by the journey.

In a sense, this research on the good student teaching placement tells us even more about the challenges of coping with not-so-good field experiences. My thinking as a teacher educator has been changed by this research. Instead of asking “How can we force change on the world to make every student teaching placement a perfect match?” I am now asking “How can we help each student teacher get the most value from their field experience, regardless of the excellence of the match?” So one contribution of this research is to begin to shift the questions we ask of our own teacher education programs. A better question is a wonderful and generative offering indeed.

Each of the three papers offers compatible but interestingly different advice on how to make the most of imperfect student teaching placements. The prescription that all three papers share is “more support.”

- More support for supervisors of student teaching, in the form of adequate compensation, time to connect, read, converse, and really learn the full implications of being a teacher educator in full (not just a standardized, disconnected service provider).

- More support for cooperating teachers, who for better and for worse are functioning as teacher educators with little to no preparation for doing so.

- More support for the student teachers themselves, many of whom are experiencing the most stressful, responsible, challenging time of their lives during student teaching. Failure is a real, painful possibility for these students. Disillusionment is a daily experience.

At Bank Street, more support takes the form of the Advisement system, expanding the boundaries of typical student teaching from the traditional trio of student teacher, supervisor, and cooperating teacher to include a group of student teachers meeting weekly with a faculty advisor who also sees them in the field. Individual and group conversations about progressive teaching and how it is and is not supported in field contexts works, in the best cases, to encourage and support even struggling student teachers. The advisor, we presume, is a full-time teacher educator who knows the full program and is skilled in progressive education and group process. And the students themselves provide mutual support—never underestimate the power of knowing that you are not alone against the world. I also want to compliment Helen Freidus for surveying graduates of the Bank Street program to learn more about the memories and attributions of teachers who have
been part of the Bank Street program. I think we could all learn a great deal about how our teacher education programs actually carry forward into practice (or fail to) by mustering the courage to follow up, to ask our graduates how it is going one, three, five or more years after graduation.

At Mills College, more support means broadening the role of supervisor, especially in "discrepant" field placements, to include heavy doses of: moral support, extending and making explicit what the student teacher has said or done, reframing problems and dilemmas, raising questions, making suggestions, and "kicking student teachers in the pants" (with love, of course). In short, the supervisor of a student teacher in a discrepant field placement will have to work very hard to do her job, and the Mills College research shows that it is possible. Interestingly, each of the cases of supervision and support reported by the Mills College authors involved different journeys, different techniques (like Sam's journal). This makes the case that good supervision is not a standardized process. Rather, it is full of invention and improvisation. Supervision at its best is an extended and artful clinical relationship.

At New York University (NYU), more support involves much of what it does at Bank Street and Mills College, but their paper adds a twist: Sometimes the placement that looks perfect on paper can be the most difficult and disappointing of all. Let me compliment Frances Rust and Marcy Bullmaster for taking a truly self-critical stance. I've heard very little self-critique among teacher educators, yet we urge our teacher education students to become self-critical themselves. The message of this case of "the perfect placement" to me is to forget our dreams of matchmaking, let go of overly optimistic expectations, and recognize that every student teaching placement is going to be difficult for someone, and most are difficult for everyone involved. The solution is not to lower our expectations and let shallowness slide through, nor is the solution to blame the kids, or blame the cooperating teacher, the supervisor, or the student teacher. The fact is that there is no easy solution, no silver bullet to make learning something as complex as teaching in under-resourced schools a smooth, easy, trouble-free, systematic process. It is messy, it is difficult, it is uneven, uncertain, heart-rending, exhausting work (and that's just the lesson-planning part). Learning to teach is intrinsically difficult, and few of our students savor the chance to look and feel like a rookie. Few of our supervisors and fewer of our cooperating teachers are veteran adult educators, veteran teacher educators. Student teaching is hard because it is hard, not because the players are dumb, lazy, or venal. The message I take from the NYU study is that student teaching will always be difficult, if we are doing it right, and that our department chairs and deans ought to at least acknowledge and reward this facet of teacher education proportionately.

I want to close by sharing with you a list of four different conceptions of the purposes of student teaching that I was stimulated to spell out by reading the papers in this theme issue. The main conception of student teaching could be:
1. The laboratory component of a teacher education program.
3. A scaffolded apprenticeship in classroom teaching.

I will not spell out all the ramifications of each of these conceptions of student teaching. But I invite you to visualize a matrix with these four conceptions as the column headings and these roles heading the rows: student teacher, cooperating teacher, supervisor, children, parents, and school administrator. The thought experiment that I want to leave you with is to begin to fill in the cells of this matrix. For example, what is the role of the supervisor if she conceptualizes student teaching as a long performance examination? And what if the teacher education program director and faculty, cooperating teacher, and student teachers all hold different answers to the question “What, for me, is the primary purpose of student teaching and how can I make the most of the experience?”
Components of a Good Practicum Placement: Student Teacher Perceptions

By Clive Beck & Clare Kosnik

In the second practicum I had instant rapport with my associate teacher; she made me feel very comfortable. One of the first things she said to me was, “I understand how important this report is, and I don’t want you to worry because I’m not going to give you a bad report.” She also said, “You know, you’re here to learn, you’re here to make mistakes; we all make mistakes when we’re starting.” So she gave me the freedom to experiment that I didn’t have during the first practicum. (Liz, student teacher)

Introduction

There is general agreement that the practicum is a key aspect of a teacher education program (Glickman & Bey, 1990; McIntyre, Byrd, & Fox, 1996). Student teachers, associate teachers (also called cooperating or mentor teachers), and university faculty all recognize its crucial role. While universities often neglect the practicum, university researchers see this as a regrettable state of affairs rather than something to be accepted (Goodlad, 1990; Zeichner, 1996). Some university commentators have said that a poor practicum experience may be of little or no value (Britzman, 1991; McIntyre, Byrd, & Fox, 1996). But their point is not that there should be less emphasis on the practicum, only that it should be improved.
Components of a Good Practicum Placement

In keeping with the perceived importance of the practicum, there has been much discussion in the literature of what form it should take. It has been emphasized that the practicum should be integrated with the campus program, within an overarching conception of teacher education (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Fosnot, 1996; Goodlad, 1990; Samaras & Gismondi, 1998). It should take place in innovative schools, perhaps ones partnered with the university in a joint program of research and teacher development (Goodlad, 1994; Teitel, 1997; Whitford & Metcalf-Turner, 1999). Associate teachers should not be coerced into their role (Cole & Sorrell, 1992), should be given adequate preparation (Knowles, Cole, & Presswood, 1994; Zeichner, 1996), and should have a critical stance toward their own teaching and that of their student teachers (Maynard, 1996; Zeichner, 1990). They should support the student teachers (Williams, 1994), give a considerable amount of feedback (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Maynard, 1996), and collaborate with the student teachers even to the point of team teaching with them (Feiman-Nemser & Beasley, 1997; Fosnot, 1996). University supervisors should work closely with associate teachers, support the student teachers, and visit the school sites often (Beck & Kosnik, 2000; Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Casey & Howson, 1993). Student teachers should experience a whole school rather than just an individual classroom (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990) and have practicums in a diversity of sites (Butt, 1994; Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1995). And they should do their practicums in pairs or clusters rather than isolated from their peers (Samaras & Gismondi, 1998; Tom, 1997; Winitzky, Stoddart, & O’Keefe, 1992)

With so much research on the practicum, what was the objective of the present study? In the first place, while some studies have consulted student teachers, we felt more input was needed from this group. We thought that as the “consumers,” so to speak, of practicum arrangements they would be able to help resolve some of the puzzles of the practicum. And secondly, we wished to gain more detail on the practicum experience: precisely what kind of “support” and “feedback” do student teachers require; just how are these best provided; exactly what kind of “collaboration” is appropriate; and so on. We sought a clearer picture, not only to contribute to knowledge in the area, but also as a basis for developing further the practicum aspect of our own teacher education program.

We were not going to accept the student teachers’ views uncritically, of course, any more than we would the views of university faculty or associate teachers. Each group has its distinctive interests and biases. We were aware of the literature which says student teachers are blinkered by their need to get along with their associate teacher, survive in the classroom, and obtain a positive report (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996). However, we believed our students would not be completely swayed by these considerations, and would have useful ideas on what type of practicum experience would enhance their growth as professionals.
Context and Method of the Study

Our one-year, post-baccalaureate teacher education program prepares teachers for the elementary level, either for primary/junior (Kindergarten to Grade 6) or junior/intermediate (Grades 4 to 8). Our practicum schools are in the multiracial urban core of Toronto and have primarily a lower SES student body. However, by contrast with the situation in some other major cities, central Toronto schools are relatively well funded and are seen as desirable locations for practice teaching and subsequent employment. Our student teachers may be described as being either middle or lower-middle class, with only about 15 percent racial minority representation. Many are the children of working-class immigrants and so have knowledge of the "immigrant experience," but they have clearly done well at school and university. Virtually all have had other vocational or study experiences since completing their bachelor's degree. Their average age is 28 years. Research is needed into how the background of our student teachers affects their capacity to teach in a multiracial, low SES urban setting.

Each year we have a cohort of about 65 student teachers and a team of two full-time and five part-time faculty. Because of the cohort and faculty-team structure, we have the opportunity to develop an integrated program with a distinctive approach. One aspect of our approach is a close connection between the practicum and the campus program; another is a sustained effort to build community within the cohort by, for example, having frequent social events, mixing the primary/junior and junior/intermediate students in most classes and in the practicum, and clustering the student teachers together in a small number of partner schools during the practicum.

In each of the two semesters of the program, our students first do their student teacher experience program (STEP) for one day a week, and then have a four- or five-week practice teaching session or "block" in the same school and classroom as STEP. STEP and the practice teaching block combined are what we call "the practicum." We integrate the practicum with the campus program by emphasizing a critical, inquiring approach in both settings, addressing issues from the practicum in campus courses, and having a major action research project, carried out during the second practicum, as the central academic requirement of the program.

All members of the faculty team, including subject specialists, serve as practicum supervisors. Each of us is responsible for from one to four schools, depending on the extent of our appointment in the program; we visit our schools often to support both the student teachers and the associate teachers. As a team we select the associate teachers and make decisions about who will continue in the role. The associate teachers are responsible for assessing the students' teaching in both the interim (mid-block) evaluation and the final evaluation. Because of the clustering of student teachers in a few schools and our frequent visits, we get to know our schools and associate teachers well. While the student teachers move to a new
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school and cluster for their second practicum, faculty stay with the same schools from one semester to the next and over successive years.

Since the establishment of our cohort program several years ago, we have engaged in research on the program. As previously noted, the present study of student teacher views on the practicum was intended both to add to knowledge in the field and to help us improve the practicum aspect of our program. The primary data source for the study was a set of semi-structured interviews of eleven of our student teachers conducted in Spring 2000. The students were randomly selected, with provision to ensure representation of females and males and primary/junior and junior/intermediate candidates. The interviews were about an hour in length; they were tape-recorded and the tapes transcribed. As promised to the interviewees, pseudonyms have been substituted for their names and the names of their associate teachers. In addition to the interviews a questionnaire on the practicum was administered to the whole cohort, also in Spring 2000. While the questionnaire was not primarily concerned with issues of what constitutes a good practicum placement, some of the responses were relevant to this study.

Questions asked in the interviews included the following: Tell me about your second practice teaching block. How did you approach this block differently from the first one? How often and for how long did you and your associate teacher debrief? How do you think your associate teacher viewed her/his role? How useful was your interim/final evaluation? How was it decided what you were going to teach? How much flexibility did you have? When you were teaching, what did your associate do? What challenges did you face in your teaching during the practicum? To what degree did your associate help you with these challenges? On average, how much preparation did you do in the evenings and on weekends? What advice would you give a student teacher just starting in your practicum placement?

In analyzing the transcripts we began by reading them several times to identify recurring issues and key sections; we kept a record of items and transcript page numbers both for each issue and each interviewee. We then found that the roughly 25 issues identified in this way could be consolidated into a smaller number of themes, of which only nine seemed relevant to the central topic emerging at this stage, namely, what constitutes a good practicum placement. For each of the nine themes we developed concepts or "codes" which seemed to capture what the student teachers were talking about: "friendliness," "respect," "collaboration," "communication," and so on. We placed a list of these concepts beside columns for each of the interviewees and, going through the transcripts again, recorded the pages on which reference was made to each concept; in this way we began to compile the frequencies for each theme noted in the report.

As we continued to examine the transcripts, some of our themes had to be modified to fit the data better, some could be combined, others had to be split into two, and some had to be deleted because they were not sufficiently represented in the transcripts. As we began to write, we gathered key quotations under each theme.
We later abridged many of the quotations, eliminated some as not sufficiently relevant, and transferred some to different themes; we often went back to the transcripts to make sure we were not taking the quotations out of context. Almost to the final stage of the writing process, we continued to modify the wording (for example, "friendliness" became "emotional support" and "communication" became "feedback") and collapse or eliminate categories to better represent the transcripts. In the end we had just seven themes, the ones that appear in this report.

The methodology employed in this study was qualitative, as defined by Punch (1998). For example, we were participant observers, we had a small sample (primarily the eleven interviewees), our interviews were fairly open-ended, we did not test a pre-established hypothesis, our data were often not expressed numerically, and we made extensive use of examples and quotations in reporting. Our "codes" for analyzing the data were modified as the analysis continued, and even our central research question emerged during the study. There was a quantitative component to our reporting: we often indicated the number or proportion of interviewees who held a particular view or responded in a particular way. Following Hammersley (1992), Merriam (1998), and Punch (1998), we believe such information can be relevant even in a qualitative study. However, our inquiry was still primarily interpretive in nature. For example, the coding of responses was obviously partly a matter of judgment, and the quantities noted did not compel us to arrive at certain conclusions but rather influenced us within a whole set of interpretations. In making these judgments and interpretations we were undoubtedly influenced to some extent by our experience in teacher education and interactions with student teachers over the years.

Components of a Good Practicum Placement, As Identified by Student Teachers

Based on our interview transcripts and, to a lesser extent, the questionnaire data, we have concluded that student teachers see the components outlined below as important for a practicum placement. In describing the components, we cite the student teachers' responses at some length in order to give the finer nuances sometimes lacking in the research literature and that we sought in this study; the quotations also help clarify the reasons behind the student teachers' point of view. While these interviews focused mainly on the student teachers' second practicum, which they had just completed at the time of the interview, there were also many references to their first practicum.

1. Emotional Support from the Associate Teacher

University researchers sometimes mention the need for associate teachers to give student teachers support in the practicum (Williams, 1994); but it is not always clear what kind of support they mean, and some suggest that associate teachers are
Components of a Good Practicum Placement

too supportive, not “challenging” the student teachers enough (Maynard, 1996). Associate teachers, by contrast, typically emphasize the need to be friendly and provide emotional support of a kind they sometimes did not receive in their own practicum experiences as student teachers (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Maynard, 1996). In practice, however, even associate teachers are often more distant with their student teachers than they realize, not in fact setting them at ease (Beck & Kosnik, 2000).

What did our student teachers think? To them friendliness or support of an emotional kind was a key component of a good practicum placement. Nine of the eleven interviewees stressed the significance of this component, even though it was not mentioned by the interviewer. Further, several gave reasons why they thought it was important, namely, that it helped them do a better job as a teacher and grow as a teacher, reasons similar to those noted by associate teachers in the literature (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Williams, 1994).

The student teachers stressed the importance of emotional support in both their positive and negative comments about their associate teachers. For example, Liz did not have an emotionally supportive associate teacher in her first practicum placement, and she clearly saw this as inappropriate. She commented as follows:

My mom was very sick and my associate was not even a little accommodating about that. I just killed myself over that practice teaching block, and the reports I got were so tepid; they were not even a little indicative of the person I was... I just wanted some acknowledgement of what I was doing, the amount of work I was doing, anything like that. I felt my work was not being acknowledged at all.

In her second practicum, by contrast, Liz had a supportive associate who “made me feel very comfortable”; in this way “she gave me the freedom to experiment that I didn’t have during the first practicum.”

Linda spoke at length about why it is important for associate teachers to be friendly and supportive toward student teachers:

You don’t go to teachers college because you need a swift kick in the behind; you know what you should be doing. You might be a little lost at first, but you need someone to say, “You know what, you’re doing fine.” The experience I had with a warm, welcoming, collegial approach made it so much easier for me to step into the classroom with confidence. You don’t want an associate who just says, “The bar has to be this high; now jump!”

She added that she sees this kind of support as especially important for female student teachers. “We women second guess ourselves 99.9 percent of the time. We don’t need somebody else second guessing us... I don’t think women need somebody to be beating them over the head. They need more building up.”

Andrew expressed appreciation of how comfortable his associate teacher made him feel; and he described how she accomplished this. One thing she did was talk to him about the experience of student teachers in her class in previous years, “not
with excessive comparison, but just to give me an idea that things were comfortable and that things had worked out very well with these student teachers.” Further, her general demeanour made him feel at ease: “She’s very fun-loving, she sees the humour in absolutely everything, and I think that’s such an important quality in a teacher. She makes you feel comfortable very quickly.”

2. Peer Relationship With The Associate Teacher

Beyond being supported emotionally, the student teachers saw being respected and treated as a teacher as an important aspect of a good practicum placement. All eleven of the interviewees made this point, without prompting on our part; and we have noticed on other occasions the tendency of student teachers to refer to themselves simply as teachers. Why do student teachers have this outlook? Partly, we feel, because they do not realize how much they have yet to learn and how demanding their first few years of teaching will be. But partly, also, because they are aware of how much they already know, their life-time of preparation for teaching (Knowles, Cole, & Presswood, 1994; Thomas, 1995), and their natural talents as teachers. In some aspects of teaching many of our students are quickly able to equal or even surpass their associate teachers, and they rightly want this to be appreciated.

The students were aware that they were not the teacher, that they were in many ways in a protected situation. For example, David commented: “Like me, my associate used humour, but not as much as me because she had to exercise more control, she was the teacher.” Brian observed: “My associate was tough but fair; and (the students) had been so well conditioned by her that I really didn’t have to do that much. So her skills made my life easier.” And Andrew said: “She would be sterner than me. I didn’t have to deal with really serious non-compliance by the students... [T]he way I look at it you’re almost like in a nice uncle role in the classroom, you’re not the serious guy... Really I’m like a guest in the classroom, it’s not up to me to start throwing my weight around.” Despite this, however, they maintained they had to be viewed as teachers in an important sense if they were to have a successful practicum.

Some teacher educators argue that student teachers should be given some other designation such as “preservice teacher” or “teacher candidate” to avoid the suggestion of lower status implicit in the word “student.” Our interviewees did not seem to mind the term student teacher; this was the term used even by the associate teachers they praised for their collegial approach. However, they felt one could be a student teacher and still be treated as a colleague. Amy, for example, took exception to her associate’s hierarchical approach: “My associate took her role (as associate teacher) too seriously, in a sense. Not that it’s not a serious position, but she approached it as putting her in—I hate to say it—a power role; it was like, ‘Well, this is my role and I’m the associate teacher and you’re the student teacher.’ And with the daily planning it wasn’t ‘Amy will do,’ but rather ‘Student Teacher Martin will do’...”
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Why exactly did they want to be regarded and treated as teachers? Partly so they could gain the students’ cooperation and get on with their teaching. Sandra, for example, objected to the fact that “he was Mr. Russell and I was Sandra.” This made things difficult for her because, since it was a high-needs school, “there were a number of non-teachers in the classroom, teaching assistants and so on... And the kids at that school were pretty rambunctious, high energy; some of them were quite defiant... So part of my challenge was to come up with lessons they could place themselves into, in addition to normal classroom management in a classroom in which I had not been set up in a position of power.” Similarly, Liz felt peer status was important for normal functioning in the classroom. She reported that her associate introduced her to the class as follows: “This is Ms. Willcox, she is going to be your practice teaching teacher, and I expect you to give her the same respect you give me. Ms. Willcox comes from the University of Toronto, the same school that I came from, and lives in this neighbourhood.” Liz commented: “All the student teachers at this school worked more as peers than as subordinates. And I think the children sensed that, because I certainly didn’t have to work to earn their respect the way I had to in my first block; in the first block the children sensed the hierarchy immediately. In this block I felt like a teacher.”

Secondly, three of the interviewees explained that it was important to be in the role of a real teacher so they could develop professionally. For example, Rita said that she learned most when she had full charge of the class because “the more responsibility you have, the more opportunity you have to figure things out.” And Linda observed that, as a result of being “an equal with the teacher,” being “considered to be a teacher by the class,” she had the freedom to put her own stamp on the class, to develop her own style. The associate sent the message that she had this freedom partly through her words, but largely through her actions:

The first day I was there she had assigned a writing-in-role assignment for the children to wrap up the Medieval Studies unit. She said to me: “We are going to have to model this for them.” So she wrote her letter and I wrote mine, we photocopied them and gave them to the students. It seems really simple but it spoke volumes, absolute volumes. I started seeing that I was in an entirely different role (from in my previous practicum).

3. Collaboration With The Associate Teacher

Treating student teachers as fellow teachers does not necessarily result in collaborative teaching; it is compatible with a “hands-off” approach to the practicum. As noted earlier, some associate teachers have a rather tough “sink or swim” attitude while others favour a friendly but also non-interventionist approach. By contrast, university researchers often maintain that student teachers need strong direction, including intervention during a lesson, and some advocate extensive team teaching.

What did the student teachers think? All eleven of our interviewees, without prompting, talked about the importance of a collaborative relationship with their
Clive Beck & Clare Kosnik

associate teacher. However, their emphasis was on collaboration in planning, finding resources, and so on, rather than in the actual conduct of a lesson; and they felt intervention by the associate teacher during a lesson, if it happens at all, should be rather limited. Linda described how she and her associate taught different aspects of the same unit, while not teaching lessons together:

My associate and I were very much partners, we worked on all sorts of stuff together to get us through a unit on Ancient Greece... Her model was not so much feedback, feedback, feedback, which is what I got in my first placement, but rather, okay, we're going to work collaboratively... She gave me some of the resources she had — her husband is a history teacher and he sent some things to her. And I was interested in taking the class outside to areas where they could sketch some Greek columns; where they could eat Greek food cheaply; and to a lab in the Museum. So there were things I wanted to do right away, and we sort of worked around that.

Similarly, David noted how he and his associate helped each other in terms of content knowledge, styles, and teaching strategies without actually teaching together: "My associate teacher likes to stick to the book, and she kept me on track... Her background is in math and science, and she completely schooled me in teaching math, which I was weak in. And I showed her things in poetry and the fun things I did for English, a lot of which she would never have thought of. So in a way, it was a wonderful fit."

While keen on collaboration of the above kinds, however, the student teachers were concerned at the prospect of excessive interruption by the associate teacher. Brian said:

(When I was teaching) she didn't interfere, she just let me do what I had to do and if she had something to say to me she'd say it after class, just between the two of us. So she was good, she never actually put me on the spot in front of the students... Occasionally she had a comment, she would say, "Oh by the way, blah blah, whatever"; but it was always a positive thing, not something like, "Oh no, you forgot to say this."

Amy, while professing to be ambivalent on the issue of intervention by the associate teacher during a lesson, was clearly not happy with the way it was done in her second practicum placement. On the whole she endured it because she had to, under the circumstances.

At the beginning of the last week of the block my associate said, "Oh, I really miss teaching and I miss my classes," and she started to interject a lot more than she had before. She would say, "Oh, can I just add in X?" and she would, and that would be half my lesson and I would have to re-shuffle it and pick up where she had left me. It wasn't undermining, or I didn't take it that way; I was like, "Come on in; do whatever you need to." But that was her, and I think it was more to my benefit to just roll with that instead of saying, "I would really like it if you didn't interrupt every lesson I do." That didn't seem worth the battle for me. I just think she's a very organized, controlled person, and not having control over her class for an extended period of time was just too much for her.
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An interesting issue is the extent to which these student teachers would have appreciated team teaching under ideal circumstances. We feel that perhaps most of them had not experienced team teaching in the best sense, and so did not talk about that possibility. Also, we think they saw themselves as having to acquire skills for the typical rather isolated teaching situation and having to prove their ability to do succeed in that type of context; so conducting classes with their associate teacher did not seem relevant to them. This points to the need to explore team teaching more in our program.

4. Flexibility In Teaching Content And Method

Many university researchers maintain that student teachers must be encouraged to strike out in new directions (Maynard, 1996; Proctor, 1993; Zeichner, 1990), while many associate teachers and some student teachers feel the main object is to learn about the “realities” of teaching and how to cope with them (Boyko & Mayfield, 1995; Maynard, 1996). We asked our interviewees directly about the flexibility allowed to them during the practicum; for example, the degree to which they were required to cover a set curriculum and adopt the associate teacher’s style and approach. In particular, we asked to what extent the program modifications involved in their action research project, carried out during their second practicum, were permitted and supported by their associate teacher. The comments elicited by these questions gave an indication of how important the interviewees thought flexibility was in a practicum placement.

All interviewees felt there should be a significant degree of flexibility during the practicum: they wanted to be able to teach, and develop as teachers, in their own way. We noticed a tendency to accept the school or government curriculum as a “given,” as something which just had to be covered, at least in broad outline. But we attributed this in part to their lack of awareness of the opportunities for selection and initiative within the official curriculum, and in part to the pressures of the practicum setting. (These again are areas in which we need to develop our program further.) On the whole, we felt the student teachers showed a serious interest in innovation, especially with respect to method. With regard to the action research project, just one of the interviewees defended restrictions placed on her program modifications, feeling there was not really time for such modifications within a teacher education program.

The student teachers’ interest in flexibility was revealed in reports of negative experiences as well as positive ones. Tina felt excessively controlled, in both content and method, throughout most of her second practicum. “There was really no flexibility. She told me which science unit to do, which social studies unit to do; and with grammar and spelling it was straight from the textbook.” Only toward the end was she permitted to do something substantial of her own, and she found that exhilarating: “In the last week I did get to do my Nunavut story with the students for action research, and take it where it was going, which was great. I mean I was so
excited to be able to do that and make the decision on my own." Rita’s associate also attempted to control both content and method.

In one of the math lessons I wanted to do something on area, and I wanted the kids to trace their shoe on graph paper and then figure out the area using yarn, counting the squares, and so on. I was starting to teach the class and she said to me, "So you’re going to do it exactly by the textbook?" and I said, "No I’m going to do it a little differently; why, what do you think?" She said, "Well maybe you should do what the textbook says"; but when I pressed her on it she said, "You do what you want to do." So I did it the way I wanted to, and the next day she did the lesson over again.

In other cases the student teachers noted that, while their associate teachers prescribed the topics to be covered, they were quite flexible about method. Sandra said: "It was pre-decided which chapters I would deal with, but it was up to me how I wanted to teach and what I wanted to focus on... I did a lot of activities with them, a lot of hands-on stuff; in some ways my associate was far more structured than I was." Amy reported that while her associate told her at the outset, "You will be doing angles in geometry, motion in science, and early explorers in social studies," nevertheless "how I did it she left open, and I ran with it. For example, in social studies I did a cross-curricular thing, they pretended they were explorers- keeping a log of what they were exploring...and they had to develop a map with angles, describe their route using angles, and make a flag with angles in it." However, Amy still felt very constrained in this placement; while her associate told her to take risks, she "just wasn’t comfortable enough to really take her up on it."

Others found their associates fairly open with respect to both content and approach, so long as what they did was broadly in keeping with curriculum requirements. For example David, who was teaching in a Grade 8 class, commented: "I wouldn’t say I had complete flexibility, because there are the guidelines put out by the Ministry that we have to meet; but I had a wide range to play with. There was just one time when I was going to show a Rap video, and I told her ahead of time, ‘There’s no profanity, there’s no rude language, there’s no nudity.’ She seemed a bit apprehensive, but once I assured her and gave her the scenario she said, ‘Okay, fine.’ In fact, she never said ‘no’ to me.” Similarly, Brian said: “My associate had a good balance. Some associate teachers, from what I’ve heard, are very demanding. Whereas she was in the middle, not one extreme or the other. I thought it was the best thing. She gave support and a bit of structure and then gave me the freedom I needed to do things like action research and the geography unit I was working on for my specialist teaching subject."

5. Feedback From The Associate Teacher

In the research literature there is some disagreement on the matter of associate teacher feedback. While university researchers stress the importance of feedback (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1995; Maynard, 1996) and most student
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teachers say they want it (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Williams, 1994), some associate teachers are reluctant to give much feedback. These associate teachers say the main thing student teachers need is experience; we learn to teach by teaching; and anyway, the student teachers should develop in their own way (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997).

Most of our associate teachers, however, gave a lot of feedback and of a fairly high quality. We attribute this in part to our selection and training process for associate teachers, and to the fact that our associate teachers do the teaching evaluation and so feel greater responsibility to guide the student teachers. In response to the questionnaire, 48 of 56 student teachers said the amount of feedback received from their associate teachers was adequate, satisfactory, or just what they needed. As to quality, 44 of 57 said the feedback given was either somewhat useful (17) or very useful (27).

In the interviews, the student teachers gave considerable evidence of desire for feedback. Some evidence came in the form of complaints about lack of feedback. For example, Sandra talked of the absence of feedback in her interim evaluation. “I felt the interim evaluation should have given me more direction than it did. What I really wanted to hear was: This is what I think you are doing; this is where you can work to improve; this I think is outstanding. So I would know where I was going. But that didn’t happen.” And James said: “I honestly didn’t get much feedback this last block; it was really informal, and just once or twice a week. I would have liked to sit down at the end of the day and go over the strengths or weaknesses of the day, going through things in a systematic way. And my formal evaluation was all positive, there were no areas identified for growth; so it was hard to take it seriously, it really had no impact.”

David spoke to the importance of feedback by describing the great value of the constructive criticism he received.

Andrea is a perfect person to have as an associate teacher because she gives valid feedback, a lot of feedback that is very useful. I quickly amended how I approached things and it made a big difference right away. She would sit at the back of the class observing and taking down notes to review with me later, about what needed improvement. For example, she told me that when you have a group assignment every student in the group should have a role. And after that my group assignments worked very well. She was very helpful.

David noted that Andrea was at first somewhat reluctant to give feedback, and he had to convince her that he was open to receiving it:

She was a bit apprehensive initially because this was her first time as an associate teacher and only her second year as a teacher. Also, she’s a very nice person and doesn’t want to offend anyone. With the interim evaluation she was a bit shaky initially, though she had some wonderful criticisms. So after about the second point I said, “You know what, Andrea? I’ve been writing poetry for many years and sending my poems out and getting
all these rejection letters. I’m used to criticism, feel free.” Because beyond what she had written down there were subtexts, that perhaps I could do this, and perhaps that. And once she opened up and realized that I was not going to be offended, things were fine. And she had all these extra points, valid points. It was wonderful.

Others made the important observation that not just any feedback will do; it must be presented in a collegial spirit, with opportunity for genuine dialogue about the matters in question. This is a point made also in the research literature (Britzman, 1991; Glickman & Bey, 1990). Linda commented: “In my first placement I received lots of feedback, but it came so fast and there was so little discussion it wasn’t useful. I have Kindergarten experience; I knew what I was doing. She would have done it differently but it wasn’t how I would do it.” Similarly, Liz received feedback that was “top-down” and hence not of much value. She said:

In my first placement I had a lot of feedback, but it was all very top-down. My associate would give me points to improve on, but when I asked her, “Well, how do you suggest I could do that?” she would say, “Well you know, when you’re doing practice teaching you kind of have to reinvent the wheel.” So she left me to sink or swim; and every day while I was teaching she would write and write and write and then hand me the sheet of paper and say, “Why don’t you photocopy that and keep it for your files.” There was no discussion of what she had written down.

Finally, it is possible to have just too much feedback. Amy said: “My associate and I debriefed daily, for long periods of time, which I think could be a concern. Regularly I would be there for an hour or an hour and a half after school; I was also there before school for about 40 minutes, talking about what would be happening during the day; and we also had the preps.” Obviously, if Amy had valued the feedback highly she would not have minded the time so much. But the sheer amount of feedback she identified as a concern.

6. Sound Approach to Teaching and Learning

on the Part of the Associate Teacher

Associate teachers can be supportive, collaborative, flexible, and willing to give feedback; but this is of limited value if they do not have a sound approach to teaching and learning. On the questionnaire, 49 of 58 said their associate teacher in the second practicum modeled the practices of a highly effective teacher either somewhat (19) or a great deal (30). However, in the interviews seven of the eleven said one of their associates, either in the first or second practicum, had deficiencies as a teacher which resulted in significant problems for their practicum.

One difficulty created by having an associate with poor teaching practice is that, if the student teacher tries to teach in a more appropriate manner, problems arise simply because of the difference in style. James described how the fact that the students in his class were used to a transmission approach led to adjustment problems when he was teaching.
My associate teacher was pretty traditional, just stand up and talk. So I tried to avoid that, tried to involve the students in activities. It did not always go well because they weren’t used to it and would go crazy. It was like, whoo hoo, free for all; they were pretty excited. They were quite into it. Sometimes I had to crack down on them and rein them in a bit. They were enthusiastic.

Tina and Rita spoke about how the associate’s poor practice often placed them in a difficult professional or even moral position. Tina reported an incident where her associate insisted that she “yell” at a troublesome child in front of the class. She commented: “I’m not the type of person who yells at students; I don’t think it’s appropriate, especially in front of the class, and I have a difficult time doing it.” Rita related another incident having to do with teacher-student interaction:

One student in the class was having difficulties, and we weren’t sure if she was slow or if it was a problem with her eyesight. Her mom wasn’t prepared to take her to an eye doctor, and Gail wanted me to do an experiment and get this little girl to try to read something on the board, in front of the whole class. But I didn’t want to do that to her. I mean, we knew she couldn’t see, we didn’t have to do the experiment.

Beyond the professional and moral tensions, Rita talked about how teaching with an associate whose practice was poor took a psychological toll on her: “I did it and it worked, they learned whatever they had to learn, but it was draining for me. I’m the type of person who is not good at faking it; and it was very tough, because I knew how she wanted her class to be run and I had to do that...the students didn’t say a word. Obviously, she’s entitled to run the class the way she wants. It’s just that my heart went out to the kids. It was like they were in a little bubble.”

Both Rita and Sandra noted how, in their view, the lack of fit hindered their professional development. Rita commented: “Because we had such different philosophies and styles it was difficult for me; I felt I was held back. I had to mould myself into her way.” And Sandra said:

The language program in my placement class was really limited. But I figure it’s their classroom; I really respect what they want to teach. So I felt I needed to check with my associate to see what he wanted done. To a certain extent you have to emulate them because that’s what they want to see. You take their ideas, you integrate a few of your own, maybe you vaguely try to experiment, but to a certain extent you have to stay inside their constraints: they’re writing your report card.

7. Heavy But Not Excessive Workload during the Practicum

We raised the issue of workload with the interviewees. In previous years we had the problem that many associates wanted the student teachers to work harder during the practicum than we thought appropriate. By developing guidelines and conducting inservice sessions and informal discussions with the associate teachers, we managed to get the percentage of formal teaching down to roughly 25 percent in the first week of the block, 50 percent in the second week, 75 percent
in the third, and 100 percent for the remainder of the practicum. Did we do the right thing? What did the student teachers think?

In the questionnaire responses, only 6 of 57 said the amount of time spent preparing lessons was "overly burdensome"; 24 said it was "at times taxing"; and 27 that it was either moderate or just right. This was a significant change from earlier years. In the interviews, several of the student teachers expressed appreciation of the fact that we had the guidelines. For example, James said:

The work was difficult because I’m in a different situation. I have two little boys, 2 and 4 years old; I really couldn’t do any work until they were in bed. So I’d crack a book at nine or ten o’clock and already be exhausted. It was really tough sometimes. I was just exhausted toward the end. My associate teacher followed the workload guidelines—25 percent, 50 percent, and so on. She had to be reminded about them. She was a bit miffed at first that there were such strict guidelines, but she was willing to follow them. And I think it was just right, actually. It was a good gradual transition to follow for teaching.

Those who found the workload heavy nevertheless felt it was appropriate. For example, Andrew commented:

What surprised me more than anything else about teaching was the fatigue level. And I don’t know what to say about that because that’s the reality of teaching. So on the one hand I’m thinking, wow, couldn’t things change somehow (in the practicum) to lessen the fatigue, but on the other hand... what am I going to do in September if I’m not prepared to make that type of commitment?

Just one of the eleven felt the practicum should have been more intensive. Brian said:

I went into the second placement with a lot more enthusiasm. I didn’t want to spend much time observing, I just wanted to get right into it. I thought that this time there were probably too many STEP days. I could actually have used fewer step days and a few more days in teaching, so we could get into it sooner and get started, especially since we had action research to do. In my first week I was actually doing quite a lot, and I preferred that. And the action research really gave me something to focus on; like a goal.

Divergence in viewpoint is inevitable in the matter of workload, given the diversity of life circumstances. Brian, for example, living on his own and quite close to his practicum school, was in a different situation from James. We attempt with the associate teachers to emphasize flexibility, but in doing so we have to be careful not to undermine the guidelines. Some of our associates, while complying with the guidelines, still feel we are too easy on the student teachers, that we shield them from the "realities" of teaching. We believe excessive stress can get in the way of learning in teacher education, as in education generally; it can discourage student teachers from experimenting and developing a critical, progressive philosophy of teaching and learning. Also, we want the student teachers to realize that teachers should "have
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a life beyond their profession; that being well-rounded people will make them better teachers. While we admit, as noted earlier, that many student teachers are not sufficiently aware of the rigours of teaching and how tough it will be in their first years, we do not think the solution lies in “throwing them in the deep end” during the practicum. The question of the intensity of the practicum is a matter for ongoing discussion and reflection.

Conclusion

Our conclusion from this study was that student teachers value the following elements in a practicum placement: emotional support from their associate teacher; a peer relationship with their associate teacher; a degree of collaboration with their associate teacher; a degree of flexibility in teaching content and method; feedback on performance, provided it is given in an appropriate spirit and manner; a sound approach to teaching and learning in the placement classroom; and a heavy but not excessive workload.

Some of these findings were perhaps to be expected, although confirming them was important; others went beyond what we had anticipated. For example, we had not previously recognized how important emotional support on the part of the associate teacher was to student teachers, nor is this component typically mentioned in the research literature. Similarly, the extent of the student teachers’ desire to be viewed as teachers, and the reasons given for this, provided us with valuable new insights. The student teachers’ lack of orientation toward team teaching with their associate teacher, as distinct from collaborative planning, opened up new avenues of inquiry. The degree of the student teachers’ desire for feedback—both positive and negative—was also revealing, as was their specification of how feedback should be given. And the stresses the student teachers experienced in classrooms where teaching practices were poor were in some cases more extreme than we had realized. All these findings have significant implications for the theory and practice of teacher education, and for the development of our program in particular.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the student teacher perspective on the practicum. To a considerable extent their focus is on learning classroom skills, surviving in the practicum, and receiving a good practice teaching evaluation. It is significant that virtually all the practicum components they mentioned had to do with their relationship with their associate teacher. They appeared to have only moderate awareness of, for example, the general school culture and its impact on the classroom, and the role of university supervisors in maintaining a good relationship with the partner schools and informally supporting and educating the associate teachers over the years.

Nevertheless, we were quite impressed with the idealism of the student teachers and their genuine interest in issues of teaching and learning. While they felt they had to conform to a significant degree to the expectations and practices of the
associate teachers, they often did so reluctantly. They struggled with situations where they thought their development as teachers was being hindered or their pupils' learning and welfare were being adversely affected. These were not people just concerned with getting a teaching certificate. Their professionalism was evident, underscoring the legitimacy of their desire to be viewed as teachers, and also the appropriateness of seeking their opinions on what constitutes a good practicum placement.

References


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The Impact of the Assessment of Practice Teaching on Beginning Teaching: Learning To Ask Different Questions

By Lily Orland-Barak

In her first year of teaching Liz, who had graduated from a two-year university teacher training program in 1998 and had received an award as outstanding student-teacher of English, wrote the following story:

In our everyday work, we teachers are expected to be diplomats, philosophers, psychologists, referees, police people, quiz program conductors, and an authority on almost everything. My story is not a fairy tale, but a true story about a boy, who hardly comes to my lessons. Our ‘romance’ started at the beginning of the year when Dotan kept interrupting everyone around him, and coming late constantly to class, and as a result I couldn’t teach much. That day, when he came in late again, I asked him to stand for a few seconds. Of course he refused. He threw his bag on the floor and left the room in anger. Then he blew back into the room and yelled, ‘I swear I’ll kill you!’ I was shocked. I had never been threatened before, certainly not by a pupil. ....... And just like ‘the never ending story,’ this also seems endless. Now, towards the end of the year, he comes some of the time but simply does nothing. I can’t teach ... and I have tried to turn to him with a positive and encouraging approach, but nothing is really changing. How should I go from here? What can I do ???

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Liz’s story is compelling in that it foregrounds the incongruence between her success in practice teach-
The Impact of the Assessment of Practice Teaching on Beginning Teaching

The trivialization of knowledge becomes most evident when prospective teachers leave their university course work and attempt through classroom teaching, to render this knowledge pedagogical and relevant. . . . The fragmentation—between theory and practice—is most apparent when prospective teachers live the dramatic shift from learning about teaching in university settings to teaching in actual classrooms. Throughout student teaching, it becomes the work of prospective teachers to put into practice the knowledge obtained from university courses. At
Lily Orland-Barak

the same time, they are expected to transform this received classroom knowledge, shifting from a student’s perspective to that of a teacher. However, this transformation is highly problematic. (p.46)

Britzman’s theorizing scaffolds the complexities inherent in the passage from student teacher to teacher and challenges us to re-examine our approach to both the structure and validation of the practice teaching experience. Indeed, the last decade of research on teacher learning has seen numerous programmatic agendas designed to address the conditions by which the structure of practicum settings in teacher education programs can become an occasion for smoothing the passage from student teaching to teaching (Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). Focusing on the impact of the ecology of practice teaching settings (the type of classroom, school culture, curriculum, community) on student teacher development, research studies point to the effect of socializing pressures of the field (Britzman, 1991; Zeichner & Gore, 1990); to the crucial role of the cooperating teacher as teacher educator, mentor, and reflective coacher (Schon, 1987; Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Calderhead, 1991; Elliot & Calderhead, 1993, Maynard & Furlong, 1993; McIntyre, Hagger, & Wilkin, 1993) to the importance of preparing student teachers for managing with differences across contexts of practice (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990), and to the significance of creating practicum contexts that allow for experimenting with low-risk conditions, providing protected yet authentically complex opportunities for engaging in vicarious teaching tasks (Feiman-Nemser, 1990), and for developing a sense of self efficacy as future teachers (Mulhound & Wallace, 2001).

The study of practicum settings has also focused on examining the implications of the assessment of practice teaching for advancing prospective teachers’ understandings of their experiences in the first years of teaching. Guyton and McIntyre (1990) remind us of the stated value of formative and summative evaluation of student teachers to serve purposes of gatekeeping or control of entry into the profession, of differentiation according to competency levels, of feedback for program modification, and for the validation of the program’s goals (p.525). Drawing on studies that investigated the structure of the assessment process at various developmental levels, they argue for the need to make explicit the assessment of different competencies at different levels, and in doing so, mitigate the widespread illusion (and subsequent disappointment) that high achievement in practice teaching is a predictor of success in teaching.

Darling-Hammond and Snyder (2001) suggest that teacher education programs include the use of authentic assessments of teaching, (including cases, exhibitions of performance-, portfolio-, and problem-based inquiries) as opportunities for evaluating teachers’ thinking and actions in situations that are experience-based and problem oriented and that include or simulate actual acts of teaching. These assessment tools, they contend, might better reflect the complexity of teaching and eventually help novices to manage within the contextualized nature of teaching and learning (p. 524).
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The Study

My interest in pursuing this inquiry was actually triggered by Liz's first year story. Having been her university professor in the didactic seminar course for the teaching of English as a foreign language, reading her story echoed numerous stories that former student teachers in their first year had shared with me (Orland, 2000) and challenged me to reconsider the learning value of their assessment as student teachers for making sense of the first teaching experiences. Did Liz ever imagine that the outstanding assessment of her performance in practice teaching would be negated by the difficulties that she was experiencing in her first years of teaching? If so, what is the value of the assessment of practice teaching, and how can student teachers make use of their assessment to mediate understandings in their real life teaching contexts?

Research Design

To address the above questions, I designed an interpretive, qualitative case study (Orland, in progress) that focuses on the perspectives of five student teachers of English deemed outstanding by their teacher education program. My decision to chose exemplary student teachers in exemplary placements grew out of the conviction that although these students may not be representative of a larger population of student teachers, focusing on our best students in optimal teaching contexts may help us to establish a clearer vision of what we can hope to accomplish (LaBoskey, 1994; Shulman, 1992) and consequently identify a possible threshold of optimal conditions for learning to teach.

The participants were young women in their middle twenties, highly motivated, verbal, and academically successful with an overall average grade of 95 percent in their practice teaching (one day a week for two consecutive years) and in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) didactic seminar conducted parallel to their practice teaching—four academic hours, once a week, for two consecutive years (see Appendix 4). All finished their studies between 1998-2000 in an Israeli teacher education program. All had described their practice teaching placements as successful and had been assessed using both formative and summative tools, through shared processes of negotiation between the student teacher, the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor (see Appendices 1, 2, 3). Thus, I was looking at exemplary cases in exemplary placements and with multiple alternative assessment protocols—supposedly, an ideal scenario of conditions for predicting success in subsequent teaching experiences. I wondered.

Liz (pseudonym) was one of the five “exemplary” English student teachers who agreed to participate in the study. I have chosen to focus on her because she was particularly articulate in her analysis of the passage from practice teaching to teaching.
Data Sources

Data was collected from each participant separately from a variety of sources: (1) The student teacher's portfolio compiled throughout the school year and submitted at the end of the academic year to the university professor; (2) a summative practice teaching evaluation form completed by the student's cooperating teacher/mentor; (3) field notes of feedback sessions with each student at the end of practice teaching; (4) interviews-as-conversations with each student once inducted into the school system for at least one year; and (5) written stories about the first year of teaching.

Data Analysis Process

Data was analyzed qualitatively using methods of within and across-case inductive analysis (Patton, 1990). Drawing on Donald Freeman's framework (1996) of representational and presentational levels of analysis of language data, the student teachers' portfolios, which constituted the major source of data, were examined for recurrent themes (the representational level) and for how the language used reflected statements of connections to the social-professional system within which the student teachers mentors functioned, as well as levels of reflective thinking (the presentational level). Analysis of the data entailed identifying emerging patterns within the data for each portfolio, recording excerpts from the data that supported the patterns, examining them against other data sources within cases for triangulation purposes, and analyzing emergent patterns across data sources. The process was hermeneutical, allowing for recurrent cycles of “close interpretive reading” (Kelchtermans, 1996).

Drawing on these multiple, triangulated data sources, this paper describes and interprets the assessment of Liz's process of learning to teach as it connects to her attributions of her first year teaching experiences. The narrative represents the synthesis of emergent understandings of her learning and of her performance as revealed through the formative and summative assessment of her practice teaching portfolio, the final evaluation report, her first year story, and her expressed views about practice teaching from the interview-as-conversation conducted in her third year of teaching.

Assessing Liz's Practice Teaching Experience

One of the major components of the student teachers' assessment in their didactic seminar at the university was the portfolio that they had to compile throughout the school year (see Appendix 5). A major section of the portfolio is designed around encouraging students to link between the theoretical issues dealt with in the academic sessions and their realization in the classroom by establishing focuses of observation that they were asked to critically relate to in their writing. In making these connections, students were also asked to document their develop-
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...ing understandings of a specific focus of interest as they observed their cooperating teachers during practice teaching.

Noticing and Establishing Links

Liz chose classroom management as her main focus. Indeed, as her portfolio entries reveal, Liz claimed to have gained important insights about classroom management throughout the year of student teaching. In her first portfolio entry in November, Liz devoted a major section of her writing to the issue of discipline,

One of my major interests is how to control a class and everything else included under the category of "classroom management." From our short observation, we could definitely notice ingrained class routines and a well disciplined class. As we learned later, it is the result of the teacher's consistent behavior. Discipline and control are an integral part of the lesson. In fact I am going to make them my personal objectives and focus on them throughout the year.

In my evaluation of Liz's learning from her first entries, I wrote that besides being determined to make classroom management her personal agenda, Liz was already noticing and establishing links between teacher behavior patterns and classroom control. Moreover, she could identify the kind of behavior on the part of her cooperating teacher that assisted her in managing the class. She had begun to make assertions regarding the role that discipline and control play in the course of a lesson. At the time, I thought that, unlike most novices at this stage concerned with strategic compliance (Lacey, 1977), Liz had made rather rapid and even impressive progress from documenting her observations mainly at descriptive, functional levels of performance (Bullough & Knowles, 1992; Britzman, 1991; Kagan, 1992; Zeichner & Gore, 1990) to reflecting on her observations at higher levels. She was writing as an advanced beginner, attempting to provide explanations, to formulate educational principles, and to articulate a rationale for the actions that she was witnessing (Sparks-Langer & Simons, 1991).

As early as her third portfolio entry (beginning of December), Liz already begins to query the feasibility of modeling observed classroom management procedures for her own teaching. Indeed, by LaBoskeys' reflective scale (1994), she would score quite high on her ability to carefully weigh and consider the limitations of her observations for her particular context, and for using more than just a "what works criterion." Similarly, using Sparks-Langer and Simons's evaluation of reflection (1991), she would score high on "explanation with principle, theory, and consideration of context factors" (level six) and on "explanation with consideration of ethical, moral and political issues" (level seven—the highest level).

In my comments, I wrote that Liz was displaying a high level of awareness about herself and of her expectations as a future teacher, as well as a realistic and judicious view of what she can take from her observations to her own context. I also noted that she was able to attribute her teacher's flexible behavior to her status of socialization
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at school, evident of a high level of sensitivity to the micropolitics of teaching (Hoyle, 1982; Blase, 1991; Kelchtermans, 2000) and to the contextual perspective of how the school system operates and affects teaching (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Her December entry is a good example:

Sarah, my cooperating teacher is in her 13th year of teaching and therefore anything she does should be taken with a grain of salt. I mean that as a new teacher it would be problematic if I adopted her ways because they are too flexible at times. She has "gained her spot" in the eyes of the students and in the eyes of the teachers. This makes a big difference in attitude. On the other hand, I myself am not such a strict person so it is not easy for me to act as one (being very different from Sarah)...

**Articulating Educational Principles**

Towards the middle of her practice teaching (January), Liz began to show evidence of learning how to act in order to resolve classroom management problems. Critically relating to how Sarah deals with late comers when “she tells them to come to her at the end of the lesson and welcomes them with a smile,” she makes an assertion about her own educational stance on the issue, appropriating it to her context as beginner teacher: “As a beginning teacher I think you have to be strict with latecomers...because they try to test your boundaries... I don’t like to have kids miss lessons, but sometimes it becomes a matter of educational principle, otherwise the class understands that it’s legitimate to arrive late time after time.”

In my assessment journal, I noted that Liz had begun to articulate a personal educational principle that I assumed would then guide her somehow in her own teaching in the future. I also wrote that she was learning to examine the teacher-pupil dyad from the point of view of borders and regulations. And, in doing so, she was preparing herself for the future with a strategic plan of action for deliberation. In LaBoskey’s terms (1994), she was “showing signs of deliberation in setting the problem.”

**Developing Principles for Practice**

As the year progressed, Liz began to construct an important educational principle around the issue of silence in classroom management. This was particularly evident in her seventh journal entry in the middle of the school year (March), where she analysed how two teachers in two different schools handled “silence” in the classroom. By way of comparing and contrasting, she managed to select from each case those aspects of behavior with which she identified. Towards the end of the entry, she consolidated her thoughts into the formulation of an educational principle to which she saw herself committed as a teacher: “Silence is built out of respect and motivation rather than fear”:

The absolute discipline in the Arabs school was what amazed me most from the visit... at a certain point it seemed unbelievable. Perhaps the fact that there was no interaction
between the students contributed to the passive image I received. In Loren’s class the interaction between the students made the lesson much livelier, engaging the students in constant effort to search for information and think on their own. In Samira’s class it was much more difficult to sense this kind of atmosphere... Despite her sitting down most of the time, her presence was meaningful and held everyone’s attention guiding them in a totally structured way. In my opinion, this is one of her strongest skills and it is something that I would love to adopt: having all the pupils focused on her not based on the power of fear and threat but out of wanting to understand.

In my journal I wrote that Liz was not only integrating understandings from different teaching contexts, but also appropriating them towards the formulation of a personal educational theory in regard to classroom management, with consideration of ethical and moral implications.

Consolidating Progress

Let’s recapitulate the assessment of Liz’s developing concept of classroom management from her journal entries during practice teaching: Towards the end of her practice teaching, Liz had shown evidence of being aware that successful classroom management is an important educational agenda that she wants to pursue, of making links between patterns of teacher behavior and classroom control, of developing a realistic view of her expectations of herself as a future teacher and how they compare to her cooperating teacher’s behavior and educational agenda, of being sensitive to contextual factors and to the micropolitics of the school as workplace, of beginning to formulate personal educational credos in relation to borders and regulations in classroom management, and of elaborating possible strategic plans of action as a future teacher: Indeed (as I thought then), an impressive record of a student teacher’s progress.

My written evaluation of Liz’s development and her own reflections about her progress and learning as surfaced in her portfolio also correlated very highly with her cooperating teacher’s evaluation of her observations of Liz “in action” at the end of the year. In the summative assessment form, Sarah (her cooperating teacher) wrote: “Excellent lessons, interesting, well planned and challenging activities. Connects well with the pupils. Good management skills and classroom presence. Very reflective.”

Yet, despite the high correspondence between the multiple alternative assessment forms, meant to estimate Liz’s potential areas of success as a future teacher, the story of her first year of teaching falls short of action exactly at those points in which all three assessors, her cooperating teacher, Liz herself, and I, had claimed to have noticed noteworthy progress. Issues related to classroom management such as handling lateness, establishing borders, and managing silence out of motivation and respect rather than fear and punishment were manageable for her as a student teacher but not in her first year. Liz’s plea for rescue at the end of her story “What shall I do now?” shattered the rigor of our assumptions about her performance.
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Learning from the First Year of Teaching

How could the assessment of practice teaching have assisted Liz in managing her sense of defeat and frustration in the first year? With this question in mind, I approached Liz in her third year of teaching to gain her retrospective understanding of the assessment of practice teaching and its impact on teaching. I was particularly interested in learning whether Liz’s in-depth reflections, connections, emergent educational theories, and critical standpoint towards her observations of teaching so lucidly articulated in her portfolio entries had assisted her in her first year. I was also interested in surfacing aspects of the experience of practice teaching that in her view had been left unattended in the assessment process and might have equipped her to better manage the passage from student teaching practice to teaching.

In our two hour interview-as-conversation, I asked Liz to read her first year story again. I then asked her to share with me her thoughts and ideas about the assessment of practice teaching as she recalled it. I was keen to know what she thought she might have been able to draw from the assessment of practice teaching to manage situations such as the one she describes in her first year story.

Liz alluded to three important dimensions of her practice teaching experience that were not integrated into the assessment process:

- assessing how student teachers manage with potentially unsuccessful experiences;
- assessing the ability to articulate process and conflicts “on the way”;
- assessing the ability to problematize teaching beyond the specific situation.

In the sections that follow, I examine Liz’s interpretation of these three dimensions of her experience, all of which are resonant with recent studies on the assessment of practice teaching.

Assessing How Student Teachers Manage with Potentially Unsuccessful Experiences

In our interview, Liz said,

There were very few opportunities where I had to cope with classes that I really didn’t want to teach...like we would always ask to teach in the first periods, the well behaved classes, and everybody kind of protected us from the really hard classes, and from teaching at late hours in the day. We rarely had to dive in deep waters and experience frustration. We were too protected and I know (pause) we also avoided these classes on purpose but then they [the cooperating teachers] didn’t push us enough or encourage us enough to give it a try, to experience failure and then to learn from that.

Liz’s comment challenges the prevailing assumption that student teachers be placed in non-threatening classrooms in order to develop their sense of self efficacy (Lantz, 1964; Bandura, 1997). It pushes us towards a reconceptualization put
forward by Rushton (2001) that posits student teaching as an opportunity for interns to face the challenges of potentially "threatening" teaching placements, provided the necessary support and preparation is given by the teacher training program. In his narrative study case study of student-teaching in an inner city school, Rushton found that in the face of the severity of the practice teaching environment, his focal student teacher rose above the conflicts, difficulties, and "culture shock" that she had initially encountered by learning to accept the dissonance that the harsh realities of teaching in the inner city brought (p.158). By Liz's criteria, Rushton's focal student teacher should be assessed on her capacity to articulate the dissonance between her expectations of teaching and the reality of teaching in inner-city schools or in settings that she finds challenging.

**Assessing Students' Ability To Articulate Process and Conflicts "On The Way" and to Problematize Teaching**

We were never given feedback on how we managed or not to cope with conflicts and questions that we raised during planning and throughout the lesson, not because there was no time for it or because the teacher refused to talk about these things but I think because we both thought that that wasn't supposed to be the purpose of our evaluation and of our feedback session.

Liz's claim implies that the assessment of practice teaching surfaces aspects of teaching that are only indirectly visible during the classroom portion of the lesson. I found her comment particularly interesting because it focuses on teaching as dilemma-oriented thus valuing critical exploration and inquiry as important aspects of effective teaching and it suggests that we extend the focus of assessment from observable performance to the thinking and decision making processes that precede and follow action.

Liz's contention that students be assessed on their ability to articulate their process of lesson planning and the conflicts that they manage as they implement their planning speaks to Darling-Hammond and Snyder's (2000) notion of "authentic assessment" as an integrative framework for assessing both visible and "invisible" aspects of lesson planning and performance (p. 527). It also connects to studies that suggest providing structured and unstructured opportunities for students to reflect on their practice, entertain uncertainty, and articulate the thinking that goes on during the planning of lessons (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Maynard & Furlong, 1993).

Liz elaborated this point further on by contending that beyond opportunities for articulating their own thinking about teaching, student teachers lacked opportunities to "read into" the teachers' process of thinking and planning and use these as occasions for learning:

I would really have liked to get more into Sarah's head [the cooperating teacher]: how she thinks and plans her lessons, the changes that she makes as she plans and in action, how long it took her to plan a lesson. I found myself sitting hours planning lessons.
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like I was drowning in my first year. I would have liked to be more accompanied or aware of the process the teacher goes through and also how she manages with problematic kids on an on going basis. Does she share her problem with other teachers? Is that O.K.? Now, after three years, I know that it is important to share problems with other teachers because probably I am not the only one. I have learned that conflicts are not a matter to hide and it doesn’t mean you are incompetent. I wish that had been given more space in practice teaching!

Mentors’ unwillingness to expose their own conflicts and uncertainties is well documented in the literature. From recent research studies we learn that mentors are reluctant to expose student teachers to problematic classes both due to their “protective attitude” towards the mentee and to the widespread contention that a student’s failure to manage a particular class while being observed by the university supervisor is indirectly an indication of the mentor’s own inability (McIntyre, Hagger & Wilkin, 1993). Mentors/cooperating teachers, writes Lacey (1977), are unwilling to disclose their own pitfalls for fear that these might impinge on their professional image and choose instead to remain silent within the closed doors of their classrooms. This “silence,” as Clarke’s (1995) study of student teacher reflection suggests, leads to emergent tensions between planning and performance in practicum settings—the very situation that Liz’s comment identifies.

Liz continues:

It was all too neat. We weren’t exposed to too many conflicts that we might have to deal with when we start teaching. We spoke about things that we had problems about within our own lessons but not beyond that. There are so many things that we could have known in advance—kinds of dilemmas that we might have to face and how to manage them. If we knew about them in advance, we could have used that as information when we encounter a similar case. And that could also be part of our assessment not just our performance but being evaluated on how we deal with these “as if” situations.

What Can We Learn about the Assessment of Practice Teaching from Liz’s Comments?

Put together, Liz’s suggestions and comments, most of which find support in recent research studies, yield the following story: If student teachers are given the opportunity to manage in potentially unsuccessful experiences, to articulate their conflicts, to problematize their teaching beyond the specific situation, and to transform conflicts into occasions for learning, and if these aspects of the teaching practice experience are integrated into the assessment process, then we can assume that the hardships of the first years of teaching can be mitigated. Assessing these competencies might assist students to mediate understandings in “real life” teaching by drawing on those similar situations that they had to manage in their practice teaching. However, I do not think it is as simple as Liz’s syllogism suggests.

To better understand Liz’s “if... then” view of the teaching practicum
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conditions, I resorted to Schutz’s (1970) theory of motivation. Schutz contends that in the process of learning (in our case learning to teach), people (in our case student teachers) construct conscious guidelines or “dramatic rehearsals” for future actions. These dramatic rehearsals enable them to imagine or fantasize the planned action as already finished, enabling in turn, the anticipation or “typifications” of future events and situations. In the process of typifications, people are driven by two typical “idealizations”: that of “and so forth and so on” or “because” motives anchored in past experiences (what happened in the past can be projected onto the future) and that of “I can do it again” (or I can repeat my actions in new situations). These idealizations, Schutz argues, enable people to express their confidence in the basic structure of the life world, perceiving it as remaining unchanged and reliable for future conduct.

Liz’s comments about an assessment scheme conducive to “rehearsing situations” which can be drawn from as “a pool of past experiences’speak to Schutz’s (1970) theory of motivation. Her “if... then” story can be interpreted as follows: Because they (the student teachers) were too protected and not pushed or encouraged enough to experience failure, they could not rehearse for similar future actions or plan actions as anticipations of future events. Because they were never given feedback on whether and how they managed to cope with conflicts and questions that they raised during their planning and throughout the lesson, they could not prepare for similar situations of uncertainty in the future. Because it was all too neat and they weren’t exposed to too many conflicts that they would inevitably have to deal with in teaching, they couldn’t plan in advance. Had she known these things in advance, Liz says, she could have used the experience as useful information to typify similar cases in the future. The assessment of these “as if situations” would enable her, in Schutz’s terms, to build a pool of typical expectations in typical contexts, to construct an operational plan and “dramatic rehearsal for future action,” to anticipate future events, to idealize that what had happened in the past will recur in the future and to develop a sense of competence that she “can do it again;” that she can repeat her actions.

These idealizations would enable her to confidently construct an unchanged structure of her future teaching which she could rely on for future conduct by forming typical expectations for typical contexts, and consequently assist her in dealing with situations such as the problem with Dotan. However, as Schutz (1970) contends, absolute certainty is impossible: During the execution of a project, the actor’s system of relevance inevitably undergoes changes resulting in a different perception and understanding of the situation, and as Schutz notes, “Foresight differs from hindsight” (pgs. 26-27).

Implications For Practice Teaching

How can we equip Liz and her counterparts in other teacher education programs...
with tools for managing “the inevitable deviations of results from anticipations”
and for managing with the sure knowledge that “foresight ultimately differs from
hindsight”? What focal issues or questions might prepare student teachers for
managing within the contextualized and unique nature of their future teaching
situations while integrating the three dimensions of practice teaching mentioned by
Liz? What kind of interpretive lenses should we wear to examine students’ “texts” in
order to surface and develop their potential to construct a formative and dynamic
vision of learning to teach while simultaneously recognizing that past experiences
cannot be replicated and developing a sense of self confidence and efficacy?

In the section that follows I address these questions by proposing a formative
assessment scheme that focuses on the development of student teachers’ ability to
conceptualize (rather than generalize), as they examine how experiences differ
across contexts by drawing implications from past experiences (rather than
searching for replications of the same experience in new contexts).

**Conceptualization Rather Than Generalization**

Let me draw a distinction between generalization and conceptualization. Within the
framework of practice teaching, to generalize would mean to be able to
project oneself into the future as a teacher functioning in certain teaching situations
satisfactorily by replicating experiences of a similar kind undergone during
practice teaching. To conceptualize would mean, instead, to make “educated
conjectures” (rather than predictions) about one’s functioning in the future as a
result of past experiences.

As Schutz (1970) contends, the drive to generalize experience reflects our need
to feel secure that once we have experienced something we can safely transfer our
understandings and skills to new situations by saying to ourselves to “I can do it
again.” Similarly, in our assessment of practice teaching, although aware of its
highly contextualized and unique nature, we tend to make generalizations with a
predictive stance towards future success (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990), mainly
because assessment functions as a gatekeeper into the educational system. We want
to be able to predict at the end of the teacher training program that students who obtain
a teaching certificate will eventually be able to transfer and “replicate” their learning
in their new teaching contexts. Driven by this legitimate concern, we tend to somewhat
overemphasize the search for generalities in teaching at the expense of focusing on
helping new teachers make sense of the singularity of each teaching context.

Adopting a stance that values conceptualizations over generalizations in our
formative assessment of practice teaching would thus imply “reading into” student
teachers’ accounts of their practice with new interpretive lenses, namely, those that
focus on students’ ability to discern uniqueness across contexts. In Liz’s case, it
would call for a re-interpretation of both her insights about teaching as surfaced in
her portfolio and in her first year story, and our own rendering of her insights as
indicative of her process of learning to teach.
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What does this mean operationally? Let us re-examine my assessment of Liz’s progress from this new formative perspective.

**Re-reading Liz’s Texts: Asking Different Kinds of Questions**

In my consolidation of Liz’s process of learning to teach I had noted that Liz had shown evidence of managing various skills and of beginning to develop a personal educational theory. What message might Liz have gotten from my evaluation of her learning? Probably something like: “You are on the right track because you have successfully managed to internalize important pedagogical and educational messages which you can generalize for future actions. You can do it again successfully in your new teaching context.”

Re-reading Liz’s texts would entail asking different kinds of questions about her account of learning, namely, questions that are exploratory in nature and guided by presuppositions that are interactional and systemic and that assess the student teacher’s ability to **make connections**, to **compare** and **contrast** between teachers, pupils, classrooms, schools, actions, perceptions, feelings, events, beliefs, contexts, etc. For example, Liz’s comment about her learning from observing the teacher’s consistency in ingraining class routines can be furthered explored through questions that encourage her to identify how the particularities of the classroom and of the teacher’s style shape the way in which consistency operates for her as a tool for classroom management. At the same time, Liz can be encouraged to analyze and envision other scenarios with different classes and/or different teachers in which consistency might be made clear by analysis of different behavior patterns. Questions such as: How is consistency reflective in the teacher’s actions and patterns of behavior? How do these patterns change as she moves from class to class? What patterns of behavior remain the same? What problems might you encounter in your teaching if you were to adopt these behaviors? How do different observations of classes extend your understanding of the notion of consistency? What might happen in a class where pupils are not used to these rules in other subjects? What might the principal say? How might the principal react? How might other teachers in the school react? What happened in this particular situation that you want to continue to have happen in your own classes and what problems or barriers would you expect to encounter on the way?

Let us consider another excerpt from my assessment of Liz’s progress. As the year moved along, I claimed that Liz had begun to construct an important educational principle around the issue of silence in classroom management. By way of comparing and contrasting how two teachers in two different schools handle “silence” in the classroom, I contend that she had managed to select from each case those aspects of behavior with which she identified and consequently consolidate them into the formulation of an educational principle to which she saw herself committed as a teacher: “Silence is built out of respect and motivation rather than fear.”

In my assessment of this particular entry I wrote that Liz had begun to show
evidence of her ability to appropriate what she was learning from her cooperating teacher for her particular context as beginner teacher. What I did not realize then was that beyond appropriating the behaviors that she was witnessing for her particular needs, Liz was actually making a generalization (rather than a conceptualization) of her learning about classroom management: Although her contention might sound like a conceptualization "silence should be based on motivation rather than on power or fear," notice the statement that ends that particular entry: "her presence was meaningful and held everyone’s attention guiding them in a totally structured way. In my opinion, this is one of her strongest skills and it is something that I would love to adopt—having all the pupils focused on her not based on the power of fear and threat but out of wanting to understand.” Of course, as we witness in her first year story, Liz was not able to have all the pupils focused “on her” and certainly not based on their need to want to learn. And, besides, is this something that we would want student teachers to replicate?

The distress that Liz experiences with Dotan’s resistance shows us something about her lack of preparation to think in different terms about classroom management from what she had observed in her practicum. Thus, Liz had shown evidence of her ability to compare and contrast, but not of her ability to problematize her convictions in order to consider new possibilities that she had not thought of before. To develop this perspective, I could have asked her questions such as: Who were the students in Loren’s lesson who were engaged in what you interpret as constant effort to search for information? And what do you mean by constant effort? Does Sarah have the same interpretation of engagement that you have? What would you do if you realized that not everybody was “on task” as you thought? What would Sarah have done? How do you know that students were thinking “on their own?” What would have happened if Loren hadn’t gotten any responses? What do you mean by “there was no interaction between the students?” What are the different ways in which pupils can interact? How do you know that despite Samira’s sitting down most of the time her presence was meaningful? And was she actually holding everyone’s attention? Who wasn’t? Is guiding the pupils in a totally structured way something desirable? If you were to adopt it in your own teaching what problems might you envision?

Reading Liz’s story of her first year of teaching wearing her “if-then” interpretive lenses enables us to better understand the source of her intermittent frustration: In face of a new context she cannot “resort to familiar instances in the past” to generalize from and consequently find a solution to her new situation. “I had never been cursed by a pupil before,” she says, implying that this is a situation that she is unable to grasp because it is new to her teaching repertoire. She cannot replicate from past experience. And, although we all draw on past experience to make sense of new situations, Liz feels impotent to resort to other instances in the past in which she had felt insulted or offended to “guide” her as frames for possible courses of action because she is searching for an exact past version of her present dilemma. Put differently: Her generalization had blocked her.
Conceptualizing Experience as Part of Formative Assessment

To push for conceptualization in our formative assessment would mean to encourage student teachers to make educated conjectures about teaching and learning as they examine the feasibility of their understandings for different contexts of teaching. It also means assessing their ability to problematize what works for the particular situation when transferring these understandings to other contexts. Conceptualizing also entails drawing implications rather than expecting successful replications of the experience. Pushing for conceptualization in our teacher education programs would mean encouraging student teachers to reflect on Shulman's (1986) question, "What is this a case of?" both on the level of "what does it represent in my teaching?" as well as on the level of "how would this case [of classroom management in Liz's case] differ from other similar cases of classroom management that I might encounter in the future?" Training for conceptualization and assessing the construct accordingly also entails assisting student teachers in the articulation of issues and questions such as: What am I learning about my developing concept of discipline? What teaching and learning conditions typify my particular teaching situation and how might these alter in new contexts? How might different interactions influence decision making?

Training ourselves and our student teachers to ask these kinds of questions within a formative assessment scheme can provide a framework or structure within which student teachers can articulate the hardships brought about by the discrepancies encountered in their new contexts. Thus, the provision of opportunities to teach in hard classes, to reflect on before, during, and after lesson preparation and implementation, as Liz suggests, need to be framed within a formative assessment structure that renders the formulation of reflexive and exploratory questions that problematize student teachers "if ... then perspectives" about teaching and learning.

Assisting students to conceptualize rather than to generalize from potentially unsuccessful experiences; to draw implications (and not replications) from the conflicts that they encounter "on the way," and to problematize teaching across contexts would prepare students for confronting the multidimensional, simultaneous, immediate, and unpredictable reality of classrooms (Doyle, 1977), whereby "learning to teach involves learning the texture of the classroom and the sets of behavior congruent with the environmental demands of that setting" (Doyle, 1977, p. 31) as well as to make judgments about the fit between particular skills, constraints, demands, and opportunities of the material environment of the classroom about the appropriateness of particular styles or techniques for present circumstances (Feiman-Nemser, 1994, p. 219).

Conclusion

The writing of this article was triggered by the daunting story of the first year
of teaching written by Liz, a former student teacher who had been assessed as exemplary student in her practice teaching. It was motivated by the question of the significance of the assessment of practice teaching for novices' performance in their first year of teaching. As Liz shared with me her ideas about what might have helped her to mitigate her sense of success in practice teaching and her sense of defeat as a first year teacher, I was particularly captured by her "if ... then" perception of the conditions in the assessment of practice teaching that she thought would eventually assist in mitigating that gap. Resorting to aspects of Schutz's (1970) theory of motivation, I could make better sense of the nature of her "if ... then" views about learning and development, and, at the same time, rethink a framework for re-examining Liz's texts. The process entailed developing an orientation towards exploring and problematizing the uniqueness of the experience of learning to teach in a particular context and towards assisting student teachers to conceptualize experiences that that are similar but not identical. Operationally, this necessitates, I believe, identifying student teachers' moments of crisis and doubt, and developing them into occasions for learning. These 'subtexts,' as Kate McKenna (1997) argues, are usually emotional, inter-subjective, and unconscious aspects of pedagogical interactions which are usually left unexplored in the discourse of teaching. Delineating the specificities of moments of crisis in the classroom and the conjectures informing those moments, as McKenna suggests, would surface the "lot more [of what is] going on in the classroom than what was being spoken about or overtly addressed" (p. 49). Attending to the subtexts of classroom interactions entails developing new grounds for dialogue to occur, grounds such as formative assessment schemes that integrate problematizing and conceptualizing as part of the evaluation of the process of learning to teach.

Finally, Liz's assertions have surfaced the controversial nature of her views about learning to teach as well as of the messages about effective teaching implied in the design of our multiple/formative assessment program.

References


The Impact of the Assessment of Practice Teaching on Beginning Teaching


Mulholland, J. & Wallace, J. (2001). Teacher induction and elementary science teaching:


**Appendix I**

**Formative Evaluation during Classroom Observation and Debriefing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Observation and Debriefing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Teacher:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agreed focus: (For example: lesson ending)
Agreed method of observation: (Example: Noting instructions & observing students actions)

Notes relating to focus
The Impact of the Assessment of Practice Teaching on Beginning Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths displayed by student teacher</th>
<th>Strategies/techniques recommended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear instructions— that they were to write down H.W.</td>
<td>Ensure pupils who can’t find H.W. diary are told to write H.W. down elsewhere.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good timing—enough time given for both recording H.W. &amp; packing away.</td>
<td>Don’t allow anyone to leave until everyone has finished copying H.W. assignment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other points for discussion

*For example*
What strategies can you think of to deal with latecomers?
What are quick and effective ways to distribute resources?
What are quick and effective ways to get to know the students?

Appendix 2

Formative Evaluation of Students’ Learning from the Practice Teaching Experience

Learning from Practice Teaching: General

What are you learning from the practice teaching experience?

Please relate to these aspects of your learning as you progress during the year:
* about yourselves
* about your new role as a teacher
* about pupils as learners
* about teaching English in high school
* about school
* about the ways in which pupils learn
* about the ways in which teachers teach
* about the English program
* about what motivates pupils
* about conditions that promote learning
* about conditions that hinder learning
* about your strengths
* about your fears
* about your uncertainties

Fill in these beginnings as many times as you can during the year. What can you say about your development as a teacher?
Make sure you document your progress by stating the date of your reflection and any other relevant detail concerning the particular experience/incident you are basing your reflections on:

- I felt....
- I was surprised to learn that.....
- I realized that ......
- I have changed my ideas about....
- I wonder....
- I thought that.....
- New questions....
- I could connect what I observed to things I learned....
- I was reminded of....
- Teaching looks like....
- Now I know that.....

### Appendix 3

**Criteria for Formative and Summative Evaluation of Student Teaching Work**

This form upon which the final summative assessment is based is completed by the student teacher, the cooperating teacher, and the university supervisor at least three times a year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Outside the lesson</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ST</strong></td>
<td>Written lesson plans. Stated objectives. Preparation of materials ahead of time. Lesson as part of unit. Awareness of the social and educational climate of the school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The Impact of the Assessment of Practice Teaching on Beginning Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs Improvement</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Very Good</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsive to pupils' needs and performance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posture and movement.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupils are actively engaged on task for appropriate amount of time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Management &amp; Organization</td>
<td>Efficient discipline and classroom management. Clarity of instruction. Appropriate reaction to unexpected situations.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Reflections after the lesson: Categories of observation.*</td>
<td>Presence:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Voice:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Proficiency:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Attitude:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Management:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Organisation:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Materials:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Discourse:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Lesson plan and implementation:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

120
Welcome to 'Teaching English as a Foreign Language' in Israel.

Aims of the course:
1. To develop tools for effective teaching practice.
2. To explore theoretical and practical issues related to the teaching of English.
3. To learn to reflect on aspects of your teaching.
4. To challenge your personal beliefs and attitudes to teaching and learning a foreign language.
5. To increase your self-awareness, confidence and independence as a future teacher and professional.

Content of the Course:
During both the seminar and the workshop we will focus on two aspects of language teaching which operate integratively in the classroom:
1. The content of language teaching and
2. The context of language teaching.

The content of language teaching includes principles and procedures of:
1. Teaching and learning language for Communication
2. Teaching and learning to function in the four domains of language: Social Interaction, Presentation, Appreciation of Language and Literature, Access to Information.
3. Teaching and learning vocabulary and grammar.

The context of language teaching includes:
1. Classroom management and organization.
2. Working with different levels of learners in a class.
3. Adapting learning strategies to individual learning styles.
4. Selecting and adapting materials; working with a coursebook.
5. Becoming familiar with the new curriculum for TEFL in Israel.
6. Creating a context for communication in the classroom.
7. Evaluating and testing language.
8. Lesson/unit planning.

The Sessions:
The nature of the sessions will be interactive and relevant to your teaching practice in the classroom. Our goal is to try to integrate as closely as possible your experiences in the field with the theoretical principles of language teaching discussed in class. Thus, during the sessions you will be encouraged to try out new ideas and techniques and to reflect on your experience with your peers. You will also be expected to share your on-going experiences in the field and to reflect on these experiences as they relate to the principles of language learning and teaching, and as they contribute to your own learning and development.

Requirements of the course:
1. On-going readings and assignments.
2. Active participation in classwork.
3. A reflective teaching portfolio. The portfolio should include:
* two important learning experiences from your practice teaching.
* one test: planning, administration, and evaluation.
* two lesson plans and reflection on the implementation of the lesson.
* your reflections on two relevant theoretical articles.
* at least eight practical tips/activities that you observed/read about/heard/tried out in class.
* one textbook evaluation.
4. For the seminar only: a case presentation of a long term Action Research project on a relevant aspect of your teaching.

Assessment:  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop</th>
<th>Seminar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in classwork and presentations:</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio:</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We look forward to a fruitful and enjoyable year!

Appendix 5

Guidelines for Portfolio Writing

*What is a portfolio?* A portfolio is a collection of evidence that constitutes a compelling argument that a person is proficient or has made progress toward that state.

*Purpose:* to engage the teacher in a reflective process as s/he documents systematically professional growth and competence.

*Remember!*
1. When you create an entry, communicate the reason for that entry, that is:
   * what the entry is. * what it is evidence of. * why you believe it is valuable evidence.
2. When writing an entry in your portfolio, consider the following questions:
   *Questions to guide your thinking*

   **Technical & Experiential**
   What happened?
   Who was involved?
   What made it happen?
   What did it feel like? For whom?
   Why did it happen?

   **Integrative & Conceptual**
   How does it connect to something I have already learned?
   What is it an example of?
   What is this a case of in my teaching?

   **Personal**
   How does the experience it connect to my personal history?
   How does it connect to my beliefs about education/teaching/learning?

   **Deliberative**
   What can I do next?
   What do I need to improve?
   What will I not do again?
   What would I try again but differently?
Cooperating Teachers’ Professional Growth through Supervision of Student Teachers and Participation in a Collegial Study Group

By Penny Arnold

Current educational thinking points toward the benefits of “cooperative learning” in classrooms. Many educators believe that students learn more effectively and in more meaningful ways when they are paired with a classmate or when they are working with others in a group (Johnson & Johnson, 1991; Slavin, 1981). Yet, our own professional practice and development as teachers frequently does not allow for such meaningful cooperative learning experiences. As a teacher new to being a cooperating teacher, I wondered what might happen in my own teaching and that of colleagues working with student teachers if we were to meet regularly as a group to
Cooperating Teachers' Professional Growth

discuss and study the role of cooperating teacher and mentor. I formed a study group and designed this study to find out whether change occurred in our perceptions of ourselves as teachers as well as in our actual classroom practice. I was also interested in knowing whether our work as cooperating teachers might have an impact on students' perceptions of classroom life.

Background

There are several areas of educational research that relate to my interest in collegial professional development for teachers. The most obvious is the considerable work that has been done over the last twenty-five years regarding the issue of professional isolation and its effects on the quality of teaching, student learning, and the profession as a whole. In his comprehensive study of the teaching profession, Lortie (1975) pointed to isolation as an historical byproduct of the one-room schoolhouse. The evolution of schools from separately dispersed one-room establishments to multiple classroom models did not change the fact that teachers worked alone. Far from becoming collaborative learning communities, modern schools, according to Lortie, "were organized around teacher separation rather than teacher interdependence" (14). In such environments, Lortie concludes, "change is impeded by mutual isolation . . . and working conditions which produce a 'more-of-the-same' syndrome among classroom teachers" (232).

Although some progress has been made, current researchers find Lortie's observations of almost thirty years ago largely true for today's teachers and schools. They highlight isolation as a major impediment to student achievement, school reform, and professional development (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Dillon, 1997; Hamlin, 1997). The high dropout rate among new teachers—30 percent in the first year—is attributed to the isolation that many teachers experience beginning with their first day of teaching. Darling-Hammond (1997) finds that many who choose to stay "learn merely to cope rather than to teach well."

In order to recruit and retain the more than two million well-qualified teachers who will be needed during the next ten years to help students meet demanding academic standards, working conditions will have to improve (U.S. Dept. of Education Information Kit; Darling-Hammond, 1998) and so, too, will professional development opportunities for teachers. We can no longer ignore the fact that what teachers know and do has a significant impact on what students learn (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Nor can we overlook the finding that what is worth knowing about real teaching situations is known primarily by teachers (Lytle, 1992). The scope and process of professional development will have to change to become both more personal and more interactive providing increased time during the school day for teacher collaboration around classroom practice, planning, and problem solving (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Dillon, 1997; Murphy, 1998).

Concern about teacher quality is most acute in schools with the highest
percentage of poor children (Darling-Hammond, 1996, 1997; U.S. Dept. of Ed. Information Kit). These are the schools in which new teachers are increasingly finding their first jobs and these are the schools where there is the least support for both students and teachers (Rust, 1999). Preparing new teachers for these settings is critically important. Successful teacher education programs include prolonged internships with adequate support from university-based and school-based practitioners alike, concrete connections between coursework and practice, and performance-based assessments. Koskela and Ganser (1995) point to the need for more direct involvement of cooperating teachers in teacher education programs as a way of narrowing the gap between schools and teacher education institutions and improving the transition of new teachers from the university to the school setting.

The Setting

I am a high school English teacher. Even though I was overwhelmed with extra assignments, when an opportunity came my way to have a student teacher in my classroom and to be one of five cooperating teacher colleagues participating in a study group, I didn’t hesitate to embrace it. After eight years of teaching in traditional school structures, I look for ways to diminish the feeling of professional isolation and anxiety that seems to be part of teaching. Having had some experience as a mentor for new teachers, I knew that being a cooperating teacher would be a lot of work and responsibility, but I hoped it would have professional benefits for my colleagues and me and that it might have academic benefits for my students.

Manhattan Comprehensive Night & Day High School (MCNDHS) is a public high school for 17-21 year olds. The day program consists entirely of recent immigrants from all over the world. Two-thirds of the night school students are native English speakers whose high school education has been interrupted or delayed for one reason or another. One-third are recent immigrants. Classes are in session from 11:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Sunday. Despite the differences in students’ ages and in time of day when classes are offered, the program at MCNDHS is fairly traditional. Different teachers in separate classrooms teach discreet content-area courses. Teacher time and teaching assignments are allocated in the usual way giving teachers little time outside the classroom and no common time for collaborative planning. Teachers who choose to work collaboratively do so on their own time.

Method

My primary tool for reflection and data collection in this study was my journal. I began keeping a journal when I was a supervisor for new inservice teachers. I found it valuable to help me understand and reflect on what it meant for an experienced teacher like me to be in the classroom with another teacher,
albeit, a novice. Thus, I continued keeping a journal when I became a cooperating teacher. I wrote down my initial thoughts and ideas about the prospect of taking on the role of cooperating teacher, as well as observations, struggles, and successes in working with my student teacher.

In addition to the journal, I distributed questionnaires to each of the five teachers in the school who had agreed to work with student teachers. I also tape recorded and transcribed for analysis the five cooperating teacher study group sessions that we developed for ourselves during the term. About half way through the study, I realized how valuable it might be to get the students’ perceptions of having student teachers. I began to wonder if the students in our classes might be aware of any differences in their teachers as a result of the presence of student teachers. I also wanted to know if they thought there were any changes occurring in their classes vis-a-vis the presence of student teachers. So, I distributed questionnaires to the students in each class that had a student/cooperating teacher pair. At the end of the term, I interviewed my cooperating teacher colleagues to find out what they thought about the experience of being part of a cooperating/student teacher pair and meeting together with colleagues who were also in that role.

Data

I did a content analysis of these various data sources to determine how the five cooperating teachers and their students perceived changes in teaching practice as a result of the student teachers’ presence as well as to discern whether and how the study group’s conversation related to professional development.

My Journal

My journal reveals my initial anxiety about taking on the role of cooperating teacher. I wrote questions such as, “How can I take on the responsibility of someone looking to me for direction?” and “How will I handle the scrutiny of my own teaching?” But the journal also reveals that the experience of being a cooperating teacher may have nudged me to grow in ways that I had not been able to previously. For example, I wrote about the responsibility and stimulus of being looked to as the “expert” by my student teacher:

Some of her questions have not been so easy to answer off the top of my head. In fact, some of her questions have been my own unanswered questions that I wished I had someone to help me with. In the process of trying to help her, I have helped myself and my students.

In a journal entry about one month into the term, I wrote about the change in our classroom seating arrangement. I attributed the change to my student teacher’s presence. We had been struggling with ways to improve oral participation in the ESL Beginner class. She suggested changing the seating arrangement permanently into a semi-circle of partners. Although I had routinely made temporary
changes to accommodate pair/group work, I didn’t seriously consider a permanent change because I share the room with so many other teachers. With her there to help and for her benefit as a developing teacher, we made the change. I wrote in my journal, “I like the results. . . . I think it makes students feel more a part of the action of a whole.” Interestingly, this feeling was echoed later by some students on their questionnaire responses.

Teacher Questionnaires

Toward the end of the term, I gave out a questionnaire to the five participating cooperating teachers. The questionnaire consisted of the following open-ended questions:

◆ What is your understanding of the role of the cooperating teacher?
◆ What is your understanding of the role of the student teacher?
◆ How has your class been affected by the presence of a student teacher?
◆ What effect, if any, has the experience of being a cooperating teacher had on your own practice?
◆ What do you like about having the student teacher?
◆ What do you dislike about having the student teacher?

All of the cooperating teachers wrote about their feelings of responsibility to support and guide their student teachers. They used the words mentor, model, guide, facilitator, and support when asked about the role of the cooperating teacher. Each of the teachers noted specific ways in which the experience had affected her teaching. Their responses can be categorized as follows: collaboration, reflection, new ideas, preparedness, general invigoration, and confidence building. Four out of five teachers noted the benefits of collaborating with others in the teaching task. All of the teachers recognized ways in which this experience led them to reflect more or in different ways on their teaching. They all noted, too, that the experience had enabled them to consider new ideas and to add new methods to their teaching repertoires. Three out of five said they were better prepared and organized in order to help their student teachers. Finally, two out of five cooperating teachers found the experience professionally invigorating and a boost to their confidence. The following comment is illustrative of their responses:

It has been primarily invigorating. I have seen a few new ideas and approaches and it has forced me to be more focused and prepared than I might otherwise have been. [I’ve] reflected on some of the things I do.

Although one teacher indicated that she thought her students had taken advantage of the student teacher’s inexperience by not doing the homework that had been assigned, all of the other teachers believed the class had benefited by
Cooperating Teachers' Professional Growth

exposure to new ideas, more attention, and better, more organized planning. One teacher wrote:

[The class has been] greatly improved, more organized, many new activities, ideas, a lot of good collaboration.

Student Questionnaires

In addition to the teacher questionnaire, I distributed questionnaires to the students in the five classes where there had been a cooperating teacher/student teacher pair. Approximately 80 students completed and returned questionnaires to me. I asked students what differences or changes they noticed, if any, and what they liked and disliked about having a student teacher in their class. Some of the students were unable to answer the questions on the questionnaire with any depth because of their lack of English language proficiency. Also, some students were new to the classes and therefore were unable to note any changes to the class since the student teacher arrived.

Analysis

Responses to Questionnaires

Table 1 represents both teacher and student responses to questions regarding their perceptions of change in teaching practice in their classrooms as a result of the student teachers' presence. The responses are divided into three groups: changes in technical practice, changes in teacher's affect, and impact on students.

Students noted new seating arrangements, that they often had more homework, and that their teachers seemed to have more time to prepare. Only one student noted negatively that the teacher had less time to care about every student. Another student felt just the opposite was true, that the teacher had more time to help students.

Study Group Meetings

Throughout the term, cooperating teachers met in a study group. The approximately hour-long sessions were tape recorded and transcribed. Three of the five transcripts representing roughly the beginning, middle, and end of the semester were analyzed for their content. The transcripts were analyzed by listing each topic as it arose, then labeling, counting, and categorizing them.

These collegial discussions generally addressed one of the following topics: instructional issues (directly related to teaching/learning in the teachers' classrooms), mentoring issues (concerns around the teachers’ roles as cooperating teachers and their relationships with their student teachers), and professional issues (broader concerns within the profession). Classroom instructional issues were by far the most prominent topic in these teacher meetings (See Table 1). Teachers discussed, brainstormed, offered suggestions and problem solved together over a
Table 1: Perceptions of Changes in Teaching Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers' Responses</th>
<th>Technical Practice</th>
<th>Teachers' Affect</th>
<th>Impact on Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refined execution</td>
<td>Reaffirmed values and philosophies</td>
<td>Students thought about their expectations of a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New activities, ideas, approaches</td>
<td>Enjoyed sharing joys and disappointments</td>
<td>Opportunity to observe students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More graded work</td>
<td>Gained awareness of own progress</td>
<td>Students sensed student teacher’s inexperience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refocus on techniques such as questioning, feedback, wait time</td>
<td>Felt connection to a greater purpose</td>
<td>Exposure to new teaching style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More careful preparation</td>
<td>Opened up to different viewpoints</td>
<td>Attention, care, and concern of two people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More thoughtful planning</td>
<td>Invigorating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More organized</td>
<td>More reflective</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students' Responses</td>
<td>Saw teacher as continuing his/her education</td>
<td>Regular teacher’s Responsibilities made easier</td>
<td>More homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allowed regular teacher more time to prepare</td>
<td>Change of atmosphere</td>
<td>Less time to care about every student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New seating arrangement</td>
<td>Teacher got some help</td>
<td>Teacher has more time to help students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learn more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Introduced to new ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

wide variety of specific classroom concerns. Although none of these was a planned agenda item, teachers addressed issues such as vocabulary instruction, pair work, pre-reading activities, pacing of lessons, selecting appropriate materials, and dealing with latecomers. Seventy-nine percent of the first conversation focused on instructional issues, 17 percent on issues concerning the mentoring role, and 4 percent on broader professional issues such as research. Subsequent study group conversations continued to be weighted heavily toward matters of classroom instruction: 64 percent and 63 percent respectively.

On the last day of our study group, I interviewed teacher participants to find out what they thought of the experience of having a student teacher and meeting regularly as a study group. Their answers reinforced much of the data collected in the questionnaires. In general, teachers agreed that the opportunity to collaborate
Cooperating Teachers’ Professional Growth

with someone had provided the stimuli for meaningful reflection, the introduction of new ideas, and more careful planning and articulation of teaching methods.

Discussion

My data suggest that assuming the role of cooperating teacher with a student teacher can provide experienced teachers with a meaningful opportunity for professional growth. Responses to the questionnaires indicate that teachers and students are aware of some growth due to this experience, though it is hard to tease out whether their claims about change are due simply to the presence of the student teachers or to the combination of opportunities for collegial interaction and mentoring that the term afforded them. What is clear is that such an experience can provide a purposeful focus for thoughtful reflection and collegial support around student learning.

Analysis of study group transcripts yields some specific references to ways in which teachers believe that their practice has been enriched both by having someone else in their classrooms and by assuming the responsibility of expert mentor alongside the novice. More important, analysis of the study group discussions demonstrates that when given the opportunity and a real context for doing so, teachers use their time helping one another brainstorm and problem solve for the benefit of the students in their classrooms. As a result, they appear to gain confidence, seem less anxious, and are able to reaffirm their values, principles, and sense of purpose as teachers. In short, they seem to have become better teachers; they noticed positive change and so did students. I found that, in the long run, being a cooperating teacher wasn’t extra effort; it was a better effort that proved beneficial to the students, my colleagues, and to me.

Conclusion

My study involved a small sample of teachers who were voluntarily participating as cooperating teachers in an informal study group. More extensive research of student teaching models that consciously aim to enrich the professional growth of the cooperating teacher would be helpful in determining which aspects of the relationship promote professional growth and enhance student achievement. Additionally, longitudinal studies of ways in which successful models of ongoing collaborative professional work patterns reduce stress, increase job satisfaction, and improve the quality of teaching could uncover critical pathways to retaining highly-skilled teachers in the profession. Studies that reveal best ways to structure time to allow for such collaboration need to weigh in. Further action research should be done to find out more about student perceptions of such collaboration and its impact on student performance. What is the value for students of witnessing the successful negotiation of two adult professionals in their midst? Is it an instructive
model for a working partnership? In what specific ways does this show up in the students' abilities to collaborate with classmates around learning tasks? In what ways does it affect student achievement?

I believe that my study has implications for school restructuring, professional development and evaluation policies, and teacher education programs. It suggests benefits to teachers and students of structuring teaching schedules and school schedules to incorporate teachers working together, watching each other work, giving each other feedback, and allowing time to talk about what they are seeing and learning. Collaborative problem solving, planning, and peer observations should be a regular part of a teacher's professional growth across the span of his/her career. University programs, teacher educators, and schools should work together to make the student teacher/cooperating teacher experience a professional development opportunity for both the student teacher and the cooperating experienced teacher. Toward these ends, I propose the following policies:

- Participation as a supervising teacher should be an option for experienced teachers to fulfill professional development requirements within schools and school systems.

- Teacher Education programs should include collegial study groups for cooperating teachers as well as student teachers. This is a built-in opportunity for meaningful, job-embedded professional growth of experienced teachers and would make Teacher Education programs more beneficial to cooperating schools, teachers, and students.

- Schools and school systems should build time into every day for teachers at every level of the profession to work together on classroom instructional issues.

References


Cooperating Teachers' Professional Growth


