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Abstract

This article discusses ways to improve the practice of pre-service teachers during their clinical experiences by bridging the gap between theory and practice. The authors emphasize the need for unannounced visits and immediate feedback by clinical supervisors during the field experience to better prepare pre-service teachers for the profession. Pre-service teachers were sent an online questionnaire asking them to respond to the pros and cons of surprise and scheduled visits by their supervisors. The participants in the study were enrolled in a state college in the Southeastern United States. Pre-service teachers' responses indicate a preference for direct feedback and unannounced visits throughout the clinical experience.

Introduction

As secondary social studies methods professors, we are always searching for ways to provide our students with effective pedagogical practices in addition to producing reflective practitioners. After participating in a Library of Congress "Teaching with Primary Sources" online collaboration, our secondary cohort was fortunate that the coursework dovetailed with the Common Core requirements. In addition, our social studies pre-service teachers benefited from a partnership with the educational outreach program at the regional Federal Reserve Bank and learned how to effectively teach economics. However, the role of clinical supervision is more problematic since students have difficulty making the transition from theory to practice. In short, there is a lack of cohesion between the clinical experience, state-mandated protocols, and the assigned readings in methods courses. We attribute some of the problems to our own inadequacies, i.e., the need to better clarify expectations; however, we are sometimes unable to quell the fears that arise during students' clinical observations. Consequently, we continuously look for strategies to improve the field component for our pre-service teachers (Green, et al, 1991), in addition to preparing them for what lies ahead. Indeed, clinical observations remain one of the least-understood aspects of the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond, 2013). While the instrument for observation is admittedly flawed and in need of transformation, there is consensus that constructive evaluation is an aspect "that supports continuous improvement, both for individual teachers and for the profession as a whole" (Marshall, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2013, p. 3). In order to improve classroom pedagogy, it is imperative to make fundamental changes in teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond, 2006). A recommendation made in the (2011) National Association of State Boards of Education Report, "Teacher Preparation, Retention, Evaluation, and Compensation" states, "The key to developing high-quality teachers lies in their preparation and training

prior (emphasis mine) to entering the classroom" (NASBE, 2011, p. 5). The Report emphasizes the positive relationship between well-prepared teachers and student success; in addition, it notes that well-prepared teachers have a lower attrition rate during their first three years of teaching. Wolfolk & Hoy (1990) have correlated high-teacher efficacy with good classroom management skills and positive attitudes toward children. Schools of education are consequently compelled to do a better job of examining the role of supervision during the clinical experience to analyze its effects in creating effective teachers. In addition, the need for college supervisors to provide constructive and timely feedback during pre-service teachers' field experience is an under-utilized aspect of achieving positive results for pre-service teachers. As Ericsson et al. specify, "In the absence of feedback, efficient learning is impossible and improvement only minimal even for highly motivated subjects. Hence, mere repetition of an activity will not automatically lead to improvement (Ericsson et al. 1993, p. 367 in Marzano et al., 2011). The challenge remains as to how faculty supervisors can be more useful during the clinical-observation process by providing pre-service teachers the feedback most of them crave (Marzano, et al, 2011; Detruf-Turkovich, 2011; Danielson, 2010). Bailey (2006, in Akcan & Tatar, 2010) stresses that feedback increases teacher awareness, resulting in improved practice in teachers. Marshall (2012) insists that "the dog-and-pony show" be eradicated whereby the observer signs off on a spectacle that has little to do with a class's everyday routine. The subterfuge requires both parties agreeing to the inauthenticity of what occurs during the scheduled observation. Marshall (2013) refers to the practice as a "collusive deal" whereby the observer pretends that this is the way the teacher teaches all the time; the observer writes it up; the teacher pretends it is true; signs it; and it is placed in the teacher's file and they "move on" (p. 30). Marshall refers to these types of staged observations as "inaccurate, dishonest, and ineffective" (ibid.) while decrying the consequences for generations of students. If evaluations do not accurately capture what transpires on a daily basis, good teaching does not get the recognition it deserves and ineffective teachers do not get the help they need. Marshall (2013) believes that the most egregious aspect of the "dog-and-pony-show" tradition is that it allows administrators to avoid constructive ways of addressing ineffective teaching (p. 31). Drawing comparisons between the need for surprise teaching visits with the New York City Health Department's unannounced visits to rate restaurants for cleanliness, Marshall (2013) stresses that the practice ensures that proprietors have "a powerful incentive to be meticulous about cleanliness all the time, not just when the inspector is coming" (p. 32). In addition, Chance and Rakes (1994) have found that the quality of supervision provided by cooperating teachers has a profound impact on pre-service teachers but in turn criticize supervisors' lack of techniques and effective evaluation practices (p. 4). Akcan and Tatar (2010) articulate the need to train cooperating teachers to effectively supervise and provide meaningful feedback in post-lesson conferences. They also suggest that there should be increased collaboration between college supervisors and cooperating teachers during the student-teacher practicum.

My pre-service teachers expect at least one unannounced observation during their clinical experience. There is resistance among some students who characterize surprise observations as "unfair" and "unrealistic" in spite of their being calls for

more frequent and effective observations (Darling-Hammond, 2013; Marshall, 2013, 2012, 2005; Fantozzi, 2013). Puzzled over how much of my students' bluster was real and how much was a reaction to a power imbalance they might feel between themselves, their cooperating teacher, and their college supervisor (Rippon & Martin, 2003 in Fantozzi, 2013), the researcher created an instrument to determine effective practices for student teachers during the field experience. The transition from methods courses and internships—whereby students assist a cooperating teacher twice a week and begin co-teaching or flying solo—to assuming the role of being a classroom teacher renders pre-service teachers in a liminal state. Although they have obtained a theoretical knowledge base, students do not yet possess the practical knowledge that can only be derived from a school setting (Detruf-Turkovich, 2011). Throughout the field experience, pre-service teachers are transitioning from being students themselves to becoming responsible for their own students' learning—a construct which creates an entirely new set of challenges (Nolan & Hoover, 2004 in Detruf-Turkovich, 2011).

This study examined student-teachers' views on announced and unannounced visits by their college supervisors during the clinical experience to determine their effects on pre-service teachers' practice. It provides a means to discover how student teachers understand the observation experience since there is scant research on the topic (Fantozzi, 2013; Akcan & Tatar, 2010).

Methodology

This was a qualitative study using an anonymous, emailed questionnaire. It asked questions concerning the pre-service clinical observation process and was circulated to our middle and secondary cohorts in August, 2012, subsequent to their graduation (N = 16 out of a possible 41). Each participant had one cooperating teacher and one college supervisor who observed, evaluated, and advised them throughout their placement. The college supervisor was responsible for articulating placement expectations, setting the amount of time for student teachers to take over classes, scheduling two announced visits, and, in some cases, scheduling unannounced visits with the cooperating teacher. Supervisors were responsible for conducting post-observation conferences with pre-service teachers. Cooperating teachers were required to conduct two formal observations (one at mid-term and the other toward the end of the clinical experience) utilizing the state-approved observation forms. In addition, they were asked to inform the college supervisor of any concerns regarding the pre-service teacher's performance. Pre-service teachers were allowed to either co-teach their initial lessons or to work independently during their clinical experience.

Data Analysis Section

Following are the prompts and the responses to the questionnaire with some minor editing for clarity and redundancy. Table 1 illustrates the students' general background.

Table 1.

General Background Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Urban/Rural
Student A	F	22	U
Student B	F	20	U
Student C	F	23	R
Student D	F	21	U
Student E	F	20	U
Student F	M	20	U
Student G	M	21	U
Student H	M	21	U
Student I	M	21	U
Student J	M	21	U

Table 2 presents a proposed overview of the research questions, the data sources, and the data analyses that was used to analyze the data. An explanation of the analysis for each of the instruments follows.

Table 2.
Data Table

Research questions Collection	Data Source	Data	Analysis
I. First Scheduled Observation *A. How would you describe your first scheduled observation?* *B. Why or why not?*	Online Session	Week 1	Qualitative
II. Second Scheduled Observation *A. How would you describe your second scheduled observation?* *B. Why or why not?*	Online Session	Week 1	Qualitative
III. Unannounced Observations *A. Do you think unannounced observations a good idea? Why or why not?* *B. How did knowing that you would have an unannounced observation affect your student teaching? Why?*	Online Session	Week 1	Qualitative
IV. Suggestions *What suggestions do you have to improve the student-teacher supervision process?*	Online Session	Week 1	Qualitative

Instrumentation

Internal Validity

While collecting the data, the researchers worked to examine pre-service teachers attitudes and beliefs regarding observations. The researchers were concerned with the reliability of the research design and asked, “What can we as researchers do to ensure that the findings are worth examining?” Cook and Campbell

(1979) defined internal validity as the best approximation of the truthfulness of a statement. The students were asked if the information requested was fair and accurate.

Data Analysis

The strategy was to examine common themes in the transcripts for pre-service teachers (N=10) who had experience dealing with student teaching and a similar background in education. Table 3 lists researchers' themes.

Table 3.
Researchers' Themes

Support
Being prepared
Honesty

For our research purposes, our analysis was defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as the interaction between the researchers and the data collected. They further emphasized that all producers should provide standardization of themes, categories, and questions. The researchers looked for relationships occurring among the participants and the study (N=10). After the online session was conducted, the researchers used various colors of highlighters to color-code themes within the online discussion board. The data was critically analyzed for the common themes that were drawn from the researchers' literature review. Similar answers were grouped together to represent a repeated theme. For example, (N=8) pre-service teachers stated that the supervisor was supportive. Although accounts were worded differently, the meaning was analogous. Table 4 describes the participants' results of the surveys.

Table 4.

I. First Scheduled Observation

Themes	Selected Quotes
Support	Excellent, the lesson went as planned and the students were very engaged.
Being Prepared	I thought my cooperating supervisor was there and ready to observe. She wanted to make sure that I will be successful. Afterward she always gave constructive feedback. I was nervous during my first observation, but constructive criticism was given to me afterwards. I would describe my first scheduled observation as disappointing. I was excited about my lesson plan, but my timing was off so my first observation was more student-centered and did not show my abilities. My supervisor cleared the pathway of confusion I had built, and answered all questions I had clearly and concisely. I felt better prepared for my next lesson. Nerve wracking. I did not know what was expected of me.
Honesty	The supervisor told me things about my teaching that the cooperating teacher may not have shared with me. The supervisor was honest. It will capture the true teaching environment.

Table 4 *(continued).*

II. Second Scheduled Observation

Themes	Selected Quotes
Support	A little more comfortable. Better, I felt more prepared and ready. The nerves had died down some, and I was able to focus more. Constructive criticism was given.
Being Prepared	Each time my supervisor built on what I had done during the first time. She mentioned improvement and areas that I still needed to work on with some suggestions. Better, I felt more prepared and ready. The nerves had died down some, and I was able to focus more. Excellent, the lesson went as planned and the students were very engaged.

Table 4 *(continued).*

III. Unannounced Observations

Themes	Selected Quotes
Support	Because it shows how you are on your feet when you are not expecting to have your supervisor to come in and watch. I had an unannounced observation. However, if the student teacher is well prepared it doesn't matter if it is announced or not. It will capture the true teaching environment.

IV. Suggestions

Themes	Selected Quotes
Support	Do more unannounced observations because that prepares you for your job, and helps you stay on task at all times. My supervisor scheduled casual meetings with the teacher candidates to discuss upcoming assignments, concerns, and successes. These meetings were crucial to my confidence level, as well as my skill development. I feel that these once or twice a month meetings would benefit all teacher candidates and would strengthen the bond between supervisor and students. Keep the lines of communication open. Feedback. Feedback. Feedback. Materials and examples are helpful.
Being Prepared	Maybe meet before an observation to let student teacher know of expectations.
Honesty	Do more unannounced observations because that prepares you for your job, and helps you stay on task at all times.

Results

Finding 1: The Importance of Field Visits and Immediate Feedback

Results indicate that pre-service teachers (N=10) view both announced and unannounced observations as opportunities to directly improve and inform their practice (Marzano, et al, 2011; Detruf-Turkovich, 2011; Danielson, 2010). Regarding scheduled observations, all pre-service teachers (N=10) articulated positive results for their subsequent lesson when they implemented supervisors' feedback. Others remarked how useful it was to be able to discuss and analyze observations immediately afterwards since teaching is largely practiced as a solitary act (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Pomson, 2005 in Daniel, et al., 2012). Indeed, far too

many teachers complain of working in isolation. Providing pre-service teachers (N-8) with constructive feedback impels them to seek out collaboration in their professional careers (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008 in Daniel, et al., 2012).

Finding 2: Pre-service Teachers Being Prepared to Teach

In their responses, several participants (N=6) welcomed instant and specific feedback from their college supervisors and noted that the debriefings made them reflective about their classroom practice. Students' comments are consistent with Christensen's (1988) findings that college supervisors' feedback "made (pre-service teachers) more aware of their actions and the subsequent effect on their pupils" (p. 280). Hasting's (2010 in Daniel et al., 2013) study articulates that avoidance of criticism by cooperating teachers comes "…at significant cost to the pre-service teacher…[a]nd to the profession" (p. 162). Indeed, reluctance to confront ineffective classroom scenarios is a grave injustice to both pre-service teachers and their future students. Strong and Baron (2004) found that in post-lesson conferences, veteran teachers did not provide direct feedback to pre-service teachers (Akcan & Tatar, 2010, p. 154) in order to avoid conflict. In their study of the quality of feedback in excess of thirty hours of mentor conversations with novice teachers, Strong and Baron (2004) found only ten instances when the mentor made a direct suggestion to the novice teacher (p. 53). The authors postulate that mentors are adept at avoiding direct feedback, perceiving it to being interpreted by student teachers as judgmental and evaluative. However, our findings indicate that pre-service teachers are asking for and benefitting from frequent and direct feedback. Some of the more compelling reasons that pre-service teachers desire ongoing feedback from their supervisors are:

> Student B wrote, "The supervisor's feedback helped me see where improvements were needed as well as my good qualities."
> Student D noted, "Because of the expertise the supervisor had, I valued the input."
> Student E made the comment, "She gave me tips on how to be a better educator in the class."

Although there is adequate research on cooperating teachers as supervisors, there is little information on supervisory conferences' attempts to explore feedback given to student teachers (Akcan & Tatar, 2010, p. 155). It is therefore vital that the dynamics and nature of feedback student teachers receive from their university supervisors and cooperating teachers be analyzed and evaluated in order to improve their clinical experience. In addition, teacher education programs must prepare pre-service teachers—and clinical supervisors—for reflective practice to engender collaborative practice and dialog (Daniel, et al., 2012, p. 163). These components will play a vital role to redress what has historically been a detached profession. Surprise observations compel pre-service teachers to be prepared at all times. When describing the departmental surprise observation protocol, pre-service teachers said, "I knew I had to be prepared at all times since I did not know when the supervisor was coming"; "I wanted to make sure that at all times that I was doing what I should be doing as a teacher"; "I was always prepared"; "Being prepared is the key to success because you have to be flexible and alert at all times." One student recommended that our department do "[m]ore unannounced observations because

that prepares you for your job, and helps you stay on task at all times."

Finding 3: Honesty in Feedback

Finally, our pre-service teachers stated a preference for ongoing, direct feedback and for unannounced observations throughout the pre-service clinical experience—two constructs which improve teacher-preparation. While the logistics of coordinating unannounced visits can be problematic, the results are well worth the effort. Further, surprise visits must happen in real time in order to authentically capture pre-service teaching styles—a phenomenon that social media cannot accurately replicate. As John Goodlad (1970) states," Improvement will come only when we recognize that teacher preparation is not something to be done on a mass basis but is akin to other professions in its demands for individualized instruction." Pre-service teachers need feedback directly following announced and unannounced visits. Rather than seen as a "gotcha" approach, our pre-service teachers benefitted from the candid commentary provided by their supervisors and appreciated the opportunity to talk about methodologies and practice. After scheduled and surprise visits, we recommend that feedback be provided in a relaxed, informal manner so pre-service teachers view themselves as equal participants in the quest for improved pedagogy. The collaborative approach—initiated during teacher-certification programs—will help alleviate the isolation—and attrition—many novice teachers currently experience.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the findings of a research study on pre-service teachers (N=10) attitudes regarding supervisor's support and procedures. The research study found that pre-service teachers views are complex, influenced by individuals' personalities, and lived experiences. Reaffirming the existing literature, support, being prepared, and honesty were important aspects for pre-service teachers regarding the role of their supervisors. To address the findings, pre-service programs should: (1) provide supervisors who expand and challenge pre-service teachers' self-knowledge of their content and attitudes. In addition, the implications of pre-service teachers' views about teaching must be examined while demonstrating other professional obligations; (2) increase pre-service teachers' sense of efficacy (being prepared to teach); (3) explore the role of honesty in teacher training while considering multiple perspectives of learning and teaching. Further research can consider which factors are most significant in affecting support for pre-service teachers.

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