

Report from the Field

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The Evaluation of Practice Teaching: A revised approach

Abstract

Two barriers to effective practice teaching, as identified in the literature, are lack of opportunity for student teachers to address personal concerns about their teaching and the poorly defined supervisory role of associate teachers. New procedures for the supervision of practice teaching, based on principles of clinical supervision, address the aforementioned barriers. An exploratory study was conducted in which these procedures were evaluated. There was a strong preference for the new procedures. Goals seemed to provide a focus for observation and feedback, as well as an opportunity for students to address personal concerns about their teaching behaviours. During discussions with associate teachers, students were able to reflect upon their practices.

Résumé

Deux des obstacles à la pratique de l'enseignement, circonscrits dans la littérature, sont le manque d'occasions pour les élèves professeurs de se poser des questions sur leur enseignement et le rôle d'encadrement très mal défini des maîtres de stage. De nouvelles modalités sur l'encadrement des stages d'enseignement, basées sur les principes de l'encadrement clinique, tentent de surmonter ces obstacles. Une étude exploratoire a été réalisée dans le but d'évaluer ces modalités. On a constaté une préférence marquée pour les nouvelles modalités. Les objectifs semblent favoriser l'observation et la rétroaction et fournir aux étudiants l'occasion de s'interroger sur leurs attitudes d'enseignant. Au cours d'entretiens avec des maîtres de stage, les étudiants ont pu réfléchir à leurs méthodes.

Practice teaching constitutes a central component of many teacher education programs (Shapiro & Sheehan, 1986). It is generally regarded as an opportunity for student teachers to discover their suitability to the profession, hone skills, and to put theory into practice (Applegate & Lasley, 1982). While practice teaching may be one of the most important features of teacher education programs, there appear to be barriers to effective implementation: the extent to which student teachers' concerns are addressed and what is the role of the associate teacher. The purpose of this paper is to describe a procedure for supervising student teachers which attempts to overcome these barriers.

Student teachers appear to have many concerns related to their work in the classroom (Fuller, 1969). With regard to concerns, there seem to be three levels of teacher development: survival or self-oriented concerns, teacher-situating concerns, and pupil concerns (Zeichner & Teitelbaum, 1982). Most student teachers are at an early stage of development, that of mere survival (Zeichner & Teitelbaum, 1982), and are concerned with subject-matter adequacy, discipline, and personal adjustment (Fuller, 1969). Petrusich (1967) further describes the fears of student teachers as relating to an inability to maintain control of classes and to gain pupils' emotional support.

Given that student teachers claim to learn best by doing (Lortie, 1975), then practice teaching sessions should provide an excellent opportunity for student teachers to address their personal concerns. This, however, is not always the case. Zeichner & Teitelbaum (1982) write that during practice teaching sessions student teachers are told to act like the associate teacher for the duration of the session so that a good mark may be recorded on the evaluation form. It would seem, however, that during the practica student teachers should have opportunities to establish goals for self-improvement, develop competencies, and define their own teaching styles. Student teachers may also benefit from supportive associate teachers who provide feedback regarding the attainment of goals and who encourage them to reflect upon their work.

A second barrier to effective practice teaching sessions relates to the role of the associate teacher, which is both supervisory and evaluative (Martin, Isherwood, & Rapagna, 1978). At times, it is also ambiguous and ill-defined (Applegate & Lasley, 1982; Richardson-Koehler, 1988). Many of the ambiguities relate to the supervisory role (Theis & Sprinthall, 1986), particularly as they are focussed on the lack of clear goals and objectives for student teaching experiences (Grimmett & Ratzlaff, 1986). The point is furthered by Applegate and Lasley (1982) who write that there is a need to establish procedures to assist associate teachers when working with student teachers.

At the University of Ottawa new procedures for the supervision of student teachers have been developed. This initiative is intended to address the

concerns of individual student teachers and the need for direction on the part of associate teachers.

Theoretical Rationale for the Study

A promising approach to the development of expertise in teaching is found in the principles of clinical supervision. Goldhammer, Anderson, and Krazewski (1980) describe clinical supervision as a process whereby a supervisor is involved in the planning, observation, and analysis of a subordinate's work. This approach has been applied to the supervision of teachers. Haefele (1980) writes that clinical supervision recognizes that each teacher is unique and has different styles and competencies. Goals are therefore set by the teacher and supervisor in recognition of individual needs and concerns. Observational data are gathered at regular intervals and are used as feedback to assist teacher self-development. This "coaching" element enhances the transfer of new skills and approaches into the student teacher's repertoire (Joyce & Showers, 1982). Discussions between supervisor and teacher also present opportunities for mutual reflection, checking of perceptions, the sharing of frustrations and successes, and the informal discussion of mutual problems (Joyce & Showers, 1982). One important aspect of this model of supervision is that the relationship between teacher and supervisor is cooperative rather than adversarial (Haefele, 1980).

At the University of Ottawa it was felt that the principles of clinical supervision applied to the supervision of student teachers might be useful for both student teachers and associate teachers. The student teacher and supervising associate teacher could mutually establish goals at the beginning of the practice teaching session. These goals would largely reflect the student teacher's personal concerns as they relate to perceived strengths and weaknesses (Shapiro & Sheehan, 1986). The associate teacher then would observe the student teacher practise specific skills or methods and provide regular feedback (Housego, 1990). Conferencing is an important component of student teaching supervision, and there is a need for the associate teacher to encourage the active participation of the student teacher (O'Shea et al., 1988). Conferences between student teacher and associate teacher would not only involve praise and comments in management (Fieman-Nemser & Buchman, 1987), but would also encourage reflection and modelling of the essential process of teaching, that of problem-solving and decision-making (Christensen, 1988).

The new paradigm for supervision of student teachers developed at the University of Ottawa incorporates the principles of clinical supervision and elements of the literature on the practicum. Within this framework the student teacher reflects on strengths and weaknesses and participates in formulating goals that address personal concerns. The associate teacher uses the mutually established goals as a focus for observation of the student teacher in the

classroom and in the larger context as a professional. The associate teacher then provides feedback to the student on goal attainment and encourages the student teacher to reflect further on his or her teaching. Through these procedures the student teacher is provided with an opportunity to address personal concerns and participate in goal setting. These procedures also provide direction to the associate teacher for the effective supervision of student teachers.

Development of the Procedures

During the academic year 1988-89 many professors with the Teacher Education Program at the University of Ottawa expressed a need to revise the current practice teaching evaluation forms. A committee was struck to examine the current forms and suggest revisions. The committee consisted of teacher federation representatives, students, and faculty who collaborated on this initiative. A review of the literature was conducted, and committee members developed new procedures and forms based on the model of clinical supervision.

Associate teachers, as outlined by this plan, received a supervisory package consisting of an explanatory letter, a goal sheet, an interim report form, a summative report form, and a reference document in the domains of teaching effectiveness. The letter outlined the new procedures, when each form should be completed and by whom. Early in the practice teaching session the associate teacher and student teachers determined a maximum of five goals for the first week of practice teaching. These goals were recorded on the goal sheet. It should be noted that these goals were not required to be of a technical nature; they could relate broader concerns, such as curriculum or students. During the first week of a two-week practicum it was expected that the associate teacher observe the student and provide regular feedback regarding progress, particularly as it related to the achievement of goals. For new associate teachers who might be unaccustomed to observing others teach, a resource document based on O'Neil's (1988) review of the literature on effective teaching was included to provide further points of observation. At the end of the first week of practice teaching the associate teacher wrote an interim report, based on progress towards goals and other points that had been noted. The associate teacher and student teacher discussed the contents of the interim report, and they set goals for the final week of practice teaching. These goals may be different from previous ones or an extension of previous goals. The cycle of observation and regular feedback was to be continued during this week, and a summative report was to be written for the student teacher by the associate teacher. On the final day of the practice teaching session the associate teacher and student teacher discussed the summative evaluation. It was hoped that these procedures would provide more direction to associate teachers regarding the supervision of student teachers. It was also hoped that the goals would provide a starting point and focus for conferences between the associate and the student. Another

expected outcome was more specific feedback for students. Finally, committee members expected that during goal setting student teachers using the new procedures would reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, thereby engaging in self-evaluation.

The new procedures differ from the current procedures in that they include goal setting and a resource document. Both procedures include the writing of interim and summative report. The summative form of the new procedures is related closely to the resource document in terms of the descriptors in the quantitative section.

During July 1989, teachers (some of whom were recent graduates) taking courses at Ottawa University read the letter, forms, and resource document for accuracy and appropriateness. The following September, faculty agreed to conduct an exploratory study of the new procedures during the last three sessions of practice teaching. During the first practice teaching session the current procedures were used so that student teachers involved in the study could evaluate the usefulness of the new procedures as compared to the current procedures. The primary purpose of this exploratory study, therefore, was to determine attitudes of associate teachers and student teachers toward the new procedures. A second purpose was to examine elements that contributed to those attitudes.

Teacher Perception of the Pilot Procedures

The role of the perceptual process in attitude formation towards an innovation is emphasized by Sherif and Cantril (1945). Perception, they report, is always involved because attitudes are derived from experience rather than being innate. A recent survey of the research on perception (Johnson, 1987) provides some recommendations and cautions for educational researchers. Although perceptions are dominant and critical determinants of behavior, they are subject to a variety of cultural, personal, organizational, and other factors which attenuate a person's ability to perceive accurately. Johnson (1987) does suggest, however, that there is considerable consistency in social perceptions among members of a group.

In the conceptualization of the innovation decision process Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) related perceptions to attitude formation and the decision to accept or reject an innovation. They identify five perceived characteristics of an innovation which are important in this process: the relative advantage of the innovation; the compatibility of the innovation with current practices and values; the complexity of the innovation and the difficulty of implementing it; the possibility of attempting a trial run without committing oneself completely to the innovation; and the observability and visibility of the innovation. Recently, Rogers (1983) revised the five perceived characteristics of the

innovation so that the eleven dimensions describing them are more precisely defined.

In the updating, the first characteristic, relative advantage of an innovation over another practice, consists of four dimensions: economy of time; social prestige accruing to the user; convenience; and satisfaction. The second characteristic, compatibility, refers to the degree to which the innovation is perceived as being consistent with the existing value system, with the user's previous experience, and with the needs of the user. The next characteristic is complexity which has two dimensions: the difficulty understanding how to implement the innovation and difficulty in using the innovation. The remaining two characteristics are each composed of one dimension. Trialability is the extent to which any innovation may be tried gradually; observability relates to the visibility to others of the results of using the innovation (Rogers, 1983, pp. 213-232).

It was therefore the purpose of this study to examine the attitudes and perceptions of associate teachers and student teachers toward the use of the new procedures. In particular, two research questions were addressed: (a) What are the attitudes of associate teachers and student teachers toward the new procedures? and (b) What are the perceived characteristics of the new procedures which affect attitudes toward the new procedures?

It should be pointed out that this exploratory study was conducted to provide information to faculty members as to the usefulness of these procedures. Therefore, attitudes and variables related to the formation of attitudes were assessed; contextual variables related to implementation were not considered.

Research Methodology

Sample

The sample consisted of 40 associate teachers and 40 student teachers. Of the 40 associate teachers there were ten representing each of the following divisions: primary, junior, intermediate and senior. The 40 student teachers were similarly grouped. Using pay lists from the last calendar year, associate teachers were selected on the basis of previous involvement in the supervision and evaluation of student teachers from the University of Ottawa. It was assumed that these teachers would be able to compare and evaluate the effectiveness of the new procedures in relation to the current procedures. Student teachers were selected on the basis of having been previously matched with a selected associate teacher.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for this study was a three-part questionnaire with similar forms for associate teachers and student teachers. The first section of

the form included items which elicited demographic information. Part two consisted of 30 Likert-type items measuring perceptions of the new procedures. Items in this section were adapted from an instrument used by Duquette & O'Reilly (1988) which reflected Rogers' (1983) perceived characteristics of an innovation. The wording of items was revised to relate to the implementation of the new procedures. In this instance the characteristic of trialability was not included as the options to participate and to do so gradually did not exist. Included in the third section were three items measuring attitudes toward the pilot procedures and three open-ended questions. All items in both questionnaires were field tested to establish content and construct validity. The reliability coefficient for the total test was .89.

Data collection

Student teachers were given information sessions on the new procedures, and faculty telephoned associate teachers to inform them of the new procedures. Participating students then took packets containing the documents related to the new procedures to their associate teachers. Associate teachers and student teachers were requested to implement the new procedures, to use the appropriate forms, and to complete the questionnaire. Upon returning to campus students submitted their own completed questionnaire as well as that of their associate teachers to their counsellor. Each set of questionnaires was then forwarded to the researcher.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed to produce descriptive statistics on attitudes toward the pilot procedures. Responses to open-ended questions were examined using content analysis. It was planned to analyze data related to perception using discriminant analysis to determine which of the dimensions were the best predictors of attitude. However, as there was a lack of variability in responses for the dependent variable, this analysis was not done because the results would not be reliable. This lack of variability, that is, only two respondents reported having a negative attitude toward the procedures, was possibly related to the small sample size.

Results

The final sample consisted of 24 associate teachers and 24 student teachers (10 primary, 14 junior, 14 intermediate, 10 senior) who had used the new procedures, which represented a 60% return.

Attitudes Toward New Procedures

Responses to a global item measuring attitude indicate that associate teachers and student teachers did not overwhelmingly feel positive (see Table 1) towards the new procedures. A small proportion of respondents (4%) felt

negative towards the new procedures, and almost half reported a neutral attitude. Interestingly, more teachers than students indicated having a positive attitude towards the new procedures (58.3% and 45.8%, respectively). However, almost 60% of associate teachers and student teachers indicate that they would prefer to use new procedures rather than current procedures (see Table 2). Moreover, 71% of associate teachers were willing to use the new procedures the following year (see Table 3), and 88% of the student teachers recommended to future students the use of new procedures during the next year. The results of the items measuring attitudes toward the new procedures would suggest therefore that associate teachers and student teachers do not have a strong positive attitude towards the new procedures. However, they do prefer to use the new procedures rather than the current procedures.

Table 1
Attitude of associate teachers and student teachers toward new procedures

	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Associate Teachers	58.3%	37.5%	4.2%
Student Teachers	45.8%	50.0%	4.2%

Table 2
Preference by associate teachers and student teachers of evaluation procedures

	New Procedures	Current Procedures	Doesn't Matter	No Response
Associate Teachers	50%	8%	29%	13%
Student Teachers	67%	17%	8%	8%

Table 3
Associate teachers' willingness to use new procedures next year

Yes	No	No Response
71%	13%	16%

Table 4
Student teachers' willingness to recommend the use of new procedures to their peers

Yes	No	No Response
88%	8%	4%

Discussion and Summary

The use of new procedures for the supervision of practice teaching was examined in an exploratory study conducted at the University of Ottawa. A committee consisting of federation representations, students, and faculty collaborated on the development of the new procedures based on principles of clinical supervision. These procedures consisting of mutual goal setting, focussed observation, and feedback were tested with student teachers and their associates. Results of this exploratory study showed that associate teachers felt more positive about the new procedures than did the students. Both groups, however, stated that they would prefer to use the new procedures rather than the current procedures.

One of the important differences between the new procedures and current procedures is mutual goal setting at the beginning of the practicum. Student teachers wrote the following comments on goal setting:

"Identifying goals can be helpful."

"Goals are important so that you know what is expected of you."

"It provided opportunities for associate and student to sit down together to talk about and reach a better understanding of expectations."

"Co-operative goal setting allows the associate to quickly perceive what the student wants to focus on and to help him/her in those areas indicated."

Associate teachers wrote the comments below:

"The goals are specific and defined."

"I am pleased to see some emphasis on aims and objectives."

"More detailed. Clearly stated objectives."

It was anticipated that mutual goal setting would provide more opportunities for focussed observation by the associate teachers. It was also expected that more specific feedback would be given to student teachers so that they could make improvements, particularly at the end of the first week of practice teaching. Comments from students suggest that the above actually happened.

"Encourages associate teachers to be precise in their day-to-day comments and in their final evaluation."

"It provides more opportunity for feedback."

"More feedback at the end of the first week."

"The [new] procedures provide more guidance to the associate with respect to what feedback will be useful to the student."

Other comments by student teachers indicated further strengths in the new. Students identified some positive outcomes of using the new procedures:

They knew the criteria for evaluation from the beginning, they felt that they had ownership in the practicum, and the summative report seemed more relevant. The comments below support these findings.

"One knew some of the focus and skills evaluation would be based upon. In other words, less uncertainty was created."

"[It] gave me a chance to work on areas I felt needed improvement."

"I had a little more freedom to pursue areas I felt were important."

"The evaluation report is more precise, and I feel it would be easier for the associate to fill out."

"Final report was more descriptive (with relevant comments)."

"Should help to make evaluation by all associates more standardized."

These comments would suggest therefore that the new procedures may be beneficial for student teachers and their associates. Goal setting would seem to provide opportunities for student teachers to address individual concerns. Focused observation and feedback provides a forum for discussion between the associate and the student. Moreover, these conferences would seem to require associates and students to reflect on practice and theory. Finally, these procedures also help to define more clearly the supervisory role of the associate teacher. It would appear therefore that the new procedures are effective in overcoming barriers to effective and satisfying practice teaching experiences. These procedures may be useful to other faculties of education that are examining ways of improving the quality of the practicum for their students and associate teachers.

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