

REPORT FROM THE FIELD

STUDENT TEACHERS

IN THE CLASSROOM:

ASSOCIATE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT. This collaborative research project involved both classroom teachers and a member of an education faculty as researchers. Associate teachers describe both the benefits and drawbacks of having a student teacher in their classroom during their teaching practicum. The nature of the relationship between student teachers and associate teachers is made clearer by identifying these benefits and drawbacks, considering the factors they perceive as stressful, and examining the coping strategies they use or recommend for dealing with stress. By involving those who have daily access, extensive expertise, and a clear stake in improving the teaching practicum with a formal way to make their knowledge part of the literature, it was ensured that the questions and issues that were important to the associate teachers were addressed.

RÉSUMÉ. Ce projet de recherche concerté a été réalisé par des enseignants et par un professeur de la faculté des sciences de l'éducation. Les enseignants responsables des stagiaires décrivent les avantages et les inconvénients que présente la présence d'un stagiaire dans leur classe. La nature de la relation qui s'établit entre les stagiaires et les professeurs responsables apparaît plus clairement lorsqu'on identifie les avantages et les inconvénients de la présence des stagiaires, en tenant compte des facteurs que les enseignants jugent stressants, et lorsqu'on examine les stratégies d'adaptation auxquelles ils ont recours ou qu'ils recommandent pour gérer ce stress. En faisant participer ceux qui ont des rapports quotidiens avec les stagiaires, qui possèdent des compétences poussées et qui ont clairement intérêt à améliorer le stage pratique, et en recourant pour ce faire à des moyens officiels permettant d'intégrer leurs connaissances aux publications, on s'est assuré d'aborder les questions qui présentent de l'importance pour les professeurs responsables.

This research investigates associate teachers' perspectives on having a student teacher in the classroom. Moreover this research is a collaborative project involving both classroom teachers and an education faculty member as researchers. The assumption underlying this research

is that what is missing from the knowledge base of the teaching practicum are the voices of the teachers themselves. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990) state:

Limiting the official knowledge base for teaching to what academics have chosen to study and write about has contributed to a number of problems, including discontinuity between what is taught in universities and what is taught in classrooms, teachers' ambivalence about the claims of academic research, and a general lack of information about classroom life from a truly emic perspective. (p. 2)

The literature suggests that associate teachers play a critical role in the professional growth and socialization of student teachers (Miklos & Greene, 1987; Boydell, 1986; Griffin, 1989). The role of the associate teacher is, however, ambiguous and in need of clarification. Gilliss (1987) sees the associate teacher as the best way to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The literature suggests that associate teachers are oriented to the practical aspects of teacher training, and are generally unprepared for the task of adequate student-teacher supervision (Griffin, 1989; Richardson-Koehler, 1988; Grimmer & Ratzlaff, 1986; Shavelson & Stern 1981). And while student teachers tend to prefer "facilitative" supervision (Kagan, 1987), associate teachers orient their supervisory role to either that of facilitator or an apprenticeship model where student teachers are expected to emulate their teaching style (Griffin, 1989).

MacDonald (1993) found that from the student teachers' perspectives, their teaching practicum experiences are full of inconsistencies. How the associate teachers evaluate the student teacher is inconsistent, the expectations the associate teachers have for the student teachers vary from associate teacher to associate teacher, the quality and quantity of feedback the student teachers receive varies, the amount of time the associate teacher is willing to spend with the student teacher differs among the associate teachers, and so forth. These inconsistencies leave the student teacher feeling stressed, vulnerable, and with little or no control over the situation. The causes of stress vary, and often there is a lot of overlap between and among categories of stress identified by student teachers. Coping strategies are somewhat limited, vary from situation to situation, and appear dependent upon the personalities of the student teacher and the associate teacher.

The literature further suggests that there is a lack of information regarding the nature of relationships among the key participants of the teaching practicum: that is, student teacher, associate teacher, and

faculty advisor. The influence of relationships among the triad members has implications for both the perceived quality of the practicum experience and the evaluative process (Housego, 1987). Kalekin-Fishman and Kornfeld (1991) report that associate teachers and student teachers valued attributes and attitudes above professional skills as criteria for predicting success in the practicum. However, Boydell (1986) points out that triad expectations, perspectives, and values may differ which can lead to conflict. Housego (1987) reports that interaction between the associate teacher and the student teacher reveals a conscious avoidance of conflict and a tendency not to engage in substantive discussions.

Irvin (1990) points out the differences between the social and political milieu of universities and schools. In the schools often an environment supportive of inquiry and of a sense of discovery is sadly lacking. "Teachers are not encouraged to probe the frontiers of knowledge, even knowledge of the pedagogy that they practice" (p. 623). Wilson (1987) reports that associate teachers are often recruited through canvassing or coercion. No training, or inadequate training programs, exist for them. Scheduling and workload militate against reasonable links between school and university faculty. Associate teachers are reluctant evaluators who are faced with differing policies and procedures of evaluation. Finally, little prestige is associated with the added responsibility.

In 1984, Zeichner emphasized the need to examine the teaching practicum more systematically when he stated that results of teaching-practicum research are often contradictory and ambiguous. Clearly, the ambiguities and inconsistencies surrounding the dynamics of the practicum experience need to be addressed. The perspectives of those involved are crucial to fully understanding the issues. Little attention has been given to the associate teachers' perceptions, or the expectations of the student teacher during the teaching practicum.

Within this context, this research was an attempt to illuminate some of these issues from the associate teacher's perspective and contribute to the overall understanding of the personal and professional dynamics regarding the teaching practicum. By identifying what the associate teachers consider to be the benefits and the drawbacks of having a student teacher in their classrooms, considering the factors they perceive as stressful, and accessing their interpretations of various events, we were able to understand more clearly the nature of the relationship between student teachers and associate teachers during the teaching practicum. These issues were investigated in a collaborative process

which involved both professors and associate teachers as researchers with the goal of better understanding the associate teachers' perspectives and to move toward a more meaningful and rewarding learning experience for all stakeholders.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the research

The objectives of this research were to identify what associate teachers consider to be the benefits and the drawbacks of having student teachers in their classrooms; to identify what associate teachers perceive to be stressful about the teaching practicum and the coping strategies they use or recommend for dealing with this stress; and, to involve those who have daily access, extensive expertise, and a clear stake in improving the teaching practicum with a formal way to make their knowledge part of the literature.

The overall objective in the presentation of this study has been to demonstrate the complexities and richness of the collaborative research process in which teachers played the dual role of participant and researcher. In order to do this, we have made liberal use of the many and extensive verbatim comments and excerpts from one of the participant's narrative accounts of the experience written during the research process (Stewart, Baker, & MacDonald, 1994) as well as excerpts from reflective papers about the research process written by Stewart and other participants one year after the completion of the project (MacDonald, 1995).

Selection of subjects

During the fall of 1993, a proposal for a collaborative research project was developed by the principal researcher (a faculty of education staff member, identified as Jane) and two co-researchers (identified by pseudonyms of Susan and Kathy), both of whom were elementary school teachers, who were teaching in the same school. The proposed project had as its aim a study of the teaching practicum from the associate teacher's perspective. Both teachers had experience as associate teachers and were working on Master's degrees and struggling to juggle their teaching, family, and academic responsibilities. The following quotation from Susan's narrative describes Jane's initial meeting with her:

I remember sitting on the green couch in the staff room with Jane, a professor from the University. . . . She wants to discuss placing

another student teacher in my classroom. She is friendly and bright – a happy new mother ready to share her experiences. And me? Overburdened and tired – I feel like I am a bad mother, a bad teacher, and a bad wife. I don't know if I have anything to offer a student teacher coming into my classroom. . . . I feel the tightness in my chest and tears behind my eyes. I have not even admitted this struggle to juggle all of my simultaneous demands to myself! I am bone weary. My celebration of teaching and parenting are lost. I try to tell Jane of the strenuous demands that my Master's course has placed on me. Jane listens sympathetically and then asks if I would like to take a course where I could have a say in the workload. Not only set the research agenda and help to conduct it, but take an active part in each stage. Have my voice as a classroom teacher heard. (Stewart et al., 1994, p. 339)

In addition there were three other associate teachers in the same school with whom I had worked on a regular basis. All five associate teachers in the school (four women and one man) volunteered to take part in this study. The average number of years teaching experience was 12. All of the participants had had student teachers in their classrooms several times prior to participating in this study. Of the five, two (Susan and Kathy) acted as both participants and researchers, and the remaining three acted solely as participants. During the collaborative process, we agreed that we would be equal partners in all aspects of the research.

The experience was to be mutually beneficial. Kathy and Susan would enjoy the convenience, and flexibility offered by conducting research in their classrooms. They would obtain a university credit toward their Master's degree during the process. They would participate in the annual Learned's Conference and co-author research papers. I would have a richer viewpoint of the associate teacher's perspective of the teaching practicum and freer access to the other associate teachers teaching in their school. (MacDonald, 1995, p. 2)

The experience Susan and Kathy would gain by being involved in this study was to contribute to their course requirements, give them confidence to conduct research, and assist in ensuring that teachers were involved in developing questions, interviewing, having a voice, and analyzing data on issues of importance to them.

Associate teachers were informed of the study's objectives and methodology and were advised of their responsibilities as participants (in data collection which included a survey, a focus-group interview, an individual interview, observation visits, and journal writing). Associate teachers were further informed that all data would be kept in a locked file, that only the study's researchers would see the data, and that

anonymity would be preserved by using pseudonyms for all names and sites. It was also made clear at this time that all participants were free to withdraw themselves, their data, or both from the study at any time. All information was provided both verbally and in writing and all participants were asked to sign a consent form establishing their participation in the study and their recognition of the safeguards designed to ensure confidentiality.

Survey

The three researchers developed the questions for the survey (Table 1). It was hoped that by having teachers involved in developing the questions, more data could be obtained on issues that were of relevance and value to teachers. The five participants were administered the survey at the beginning of the study. This meant that Susan and Kathy were involved in developing and responding to the survey. Susan reflects upon this experience in her reflective account of the project.

In January Kathy, Jane, and I meet to review what we know and to establish our questions for the survey. I have never designed a survey, and it is an invigorating session of colleagues sharing ideas and questions back and forth. We work to keep the questions open-ended and try to build a picture of the associate teacher's perspective of the teaching practicum. (Stewart et al., 1994, p. 342)

The purpose of the survey was to obtain information to assist in identifying the perceived benefits and drawbacks of having a student teacher in the classroom. In addition to identifying these factors, the associate teachers were asked to explain why and how they believed these factors had or would have an effect on their practicum experience. The data from the surveys were analyzed to help identify categories of factors associate teachers felt were significant at an early stage of the practicum experience. This was done by the three researchers reading and rereading the surveys and searching for trends, similarities, and differences among the respondents. These data also assisted in shaping the questions for the focus-group interviews and individual interviews. Susan wrote about this process in her narrative paper.

A week later, Kathy and I meet with Jane at her home to study the completed surveys and to collate the data we have gathered. It is rich and varied. After pouring over the surveys and determining the overriding themes, together, the three of us set the questions for our focus-group interview to be held in March. (Stewart et al., 1994, p. 342)

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TABLE 1. Survey questions

1. Did you volunteer to have a student teacher?
2. If you did not volunteer, who asked you to have a student teacher? How did you feel when you were asked? Please elaborate.
3. How often have student teachers been placed in your classroom?
4. Have your past experiences with student teachers been positive? Please elaborate.
5. How do you define your role as an associate teacher? Please elaborate.
6. How do you define the role of the student teacher? Please elaborate.
7. How do you define the role of the faculty advisor? Please elaborate.
8. How do you define the role of the principal?
9. How did you feel prior to the January student teaching placement? Please elaborate.
10. What would you say are the positive aspects of having a student teacher in the classroom? Please elaborate.
11. What are the negative aspects of having a student teacher in the classroom? Please elaborate.
12. What causes you the most stress when you have a student teacher in your classroom? How do you cope with this stress? Please elaborate.
13. Could any of these stresses be alleviated by the faculty of education? How? Please elaborate.
14. How do you feel about evaluating student teachers? Please elaborate.
15. Who would you approach for support or advice if you had concerns about a particular student teacher? Please elaborate.
16. How do you feel knowing the faculty advisor will be visiting your classroom?
17. Do you have any suggestions that would improve communication among the "teaching triad" (associate teacher, student teacher, and faculty advisor). Please elaborate.
18. Do you have suggestions that would improve the relationship among the teaching triad? Please elaborate.

TABLE 2. Focus group interview questions

1. Does the personality of the student teacher affect your perception of the teaching practicum?
2. In the survey you were asked to define your role as an associate teacher. Could you elaborate on this further?
3. Let's discuss the role of the student teacher in greater detail?
4. In the survey it was strongly suggested that the faculty advisor should have a more visible role. How do you feel about this?
5. Everyone found evaluation stressful. I would like to give you the opportunity to elaborate on this.
6. A student teacher causes an added workload for the associate teacher. Let's talk about this.

Focus-group interviews

In the third month of the study, a focus-group interview was held with the five associate teachers. Once again, Kathy and Susan played the dual role of developing the questions for, and participating in, the focus-group interview (Table 2). The purpose of the two-hour focus-group interview was to probe the associate teachers' understanding of events, relationships, and practicum experiences with open-ended questions – the answers to which were recorded in notes and tapes. The focus-group interview was transcribed in full and analyzed. Sandra reflects upon this experience in her journal.

... the six of us ease into chairs around a table and Jane reminds us of our pseudonyms and the rules of a focus-group interview. There is

so much energy in the room. Each teacher is eager to express ideas and opinions and ask questions of others. Heads nod fervently when a familiar feeling is expressed. Voices interject impatiently. Everyone is animated and pumped with intellectual energy. Five classroom teachers with experiences to share and a university professor listening uncritically. The focus-group lasts two hours. . . . The tape-recorder captures our disjointed zeal. Finally Jane calls for last comments and the tape-recorder is clicked off. So this is a focus-group! I am weary. (Stewart et al., 1994, p. 343)

Kathy, Susan, and I read and reread transcripts and, during this process, we documented themes, regularities, and patterns, and reported attitudes and practices. Susan recalls this process in her narrative paper.

Kathy, Jane, and I meet for a Sunday afternoon session at Jane's house at the end of March. The transcripts from the focus-group interview sit in three large piles on the kitchen table. We begin looking for themes, trends, questions, and concerns that need addressing. I read aloud and bold significant sections with a highlighter pen while Kathy takes notes and Jane interjects as ideas emerge. (Stewart et al., 1994, p. 343)

Observations

During the first four months of the study, I made visits to each associate teacher's classroom to look at relationships by observing them in various contexts, to identify issues discussed during the teaching practicum, and to act as a trouble-shooting mechanism – to identify problems, meet teachers' needs, and provide other advice and additional support. Kathy and Susan were not researchers but solely participants in this aspect of the research.

Individual interviews

An individual interview was held with each of the five participants near the conclusion of the study as a follow-up measure of the issues which arose during the focus-group interview. Once again Kathy and Susan

TABLE 3. Individual interview questions

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1. How do you personally reduce stress which occurs when you have a student teacher in your classroom? What strategies, if any, do you use to alleviate your stress?
 2. How would you handle situations where you did not feel a student teacher may be suited to the profession of teaching? Would you be able to make that judgment comfortably?
 3. How do you re-establish your routines and relationships with your class once the student teacher is gone?
 4. How important is it for the student teacher to fit in to the staff? To your class?
 5. We perceive most stress to be related to the relationship between the associate teacher and student teacher. How do you perceive this? Does this have implications for the evaluation process?

were both researchers and participants. Together Kathy, Susan, and I developed the questions for the individual interviews (Table 3). I interviewed Kathy and Susan, and in turn they interviewed the remaining three associate teachers. The interviews, approximately 25 minutes in length, took place in the participants' school. Susan describes the individual interview in her narrative paper.

Working with what we have discovered through the survey and the focus-group discussion, Kathy, Jane, and I are able to determine the direction for the individual interviews. We develop five questions to investigate how the associate teacher deals with the stress of the teaching practicum, how personality affects evaluation, and the role the classroom teacher would like to see of the faculty advisor. Together the three of us organize times for individual interviews. Jane interviews Kathy and me before we begin to interview our colleagues at school. Kathy, Jane, and I transcribed the tapes for analysis. (Stewart et al., 1994, p. 344)

Journals

To capture the process of the collaborative research, Kathy and Susan decided to record their experiences, concerns, and questions related to being an associate teacher in a personal journal over the four-month period. These journals were shared between them and served as a mode for reflection and support for each other. As a university researcher, I also had access to these journals. The information from the journals was used to document associate teachers' impressions and to supplement the information obtained from the surveys, focus-group interviews, individual interviews, and the observation visits. Susan wrote about the process of keeping and sharing a journal in her reflective narrative.

Kathy and I are reading and writing our journals to each other. At first I feel hesitant to express my experiences to her but as we move into the writing I feel more willing to be honest and direct. It is empowering to feel her support. It is empowering to be able to offer support in return. This strengthens our relationship within our small school community. We speak intimately to each other on paper breaking down the usual solitary isolation of the teacher and strengthening and expanding an already existing professional friendship. (Stewart et al., 1994, p. 343)

Throughout the year of the study, surveys, interview transcripts, observation notes, and journal writings were reviewed regularly to identify emerging conceptual categories and guide further data collection. All data were read and reread repeatedly to ensure that their intent was understood. The data were also studied by searching for patterns, themes, similarities, and differences. During this process, the emphasis was on

deriving meaning from the data that would explain and describe participants' perspectives regarding the research issues.

As a result of this analysis, categories were established to assist with understanding and summarizing participants' perspectives on the teaching practicum. The analysis was regarded as complete when all three researchers could read all data with no additional components surfacing. The findings were analyzed, and their significance was determined by considering their relevance to the research issues, comparing results to those in the literature, and reflecting on the experiences of the researchers (teachers and professor).

FINDINGS

Analyses of the data reveal that associate teachers describe having a student teacher in their classroom as a two-edged sword – although there are benefits, there are also drawbacks. To ensure the beliefs and orientations of participating associate teachers I have supported our observations and conclusions with verbatim responses from participants. To demonstrate the complexities and richness of the collaborative process, in the presentation of findings, I have once again taken verbatim comments and excerpts from Susan's narrative account of the experience (Stewart et al., 1994) and reflective papers written by all three researchers (MacDonald, 1995). For example, Susan reflects upon this experience in her narrative account of the research process.

With the data collection complete Kathy, Jane, and I analyze surveys, interview transcripts, observation notes, and journal writings to identify emerging conceptual categories. We read and reread data repeatedly to ensure that their intent is understood. Searching for patterns, themes, similarities, and differences we establish categories to assist with understanding and summarizing teachers' perspectives on the teaching practicum. (Stewart et al., 1994, p. 344)

The negative and positive concerns associate teachers have toward having a student teacher in their classroom were grouped into broad categories. Although there is overlap between and among categories, we felt grouping teachers' concerns in this way captured their perspectives. The categories are briefly explained and quotations from various data are provided to illustrate them. In most instances, all five teachers agreed upon the benefits and drawbacks of having a student teacher in their classroom. In some incidences, however, only two associate teachers addressed a concern.

The benefits of having a student teacher

All five associate teachers reported positive aspects of having a student teacher in the classroom. Associate teachers reported that student teachers supply benefits of several types. They provide new energy, new ideas, and teaching methods; they constitute a resource contributing to personal growth; and provide relief time for him or her to observe the children in the classroom.

ENERGY. This category addresses associate teachers' attitudes or beliefs regarding the positive attribute that student teachers who are enthusiastic, bubbly, flexible, and open-minded bring to their classroom. All five associate teachers reported in the survey, in their journals, and in both the individual and focus-group interviews that the energy and enthusiasm student teachers brought to their classrooms was of benefit. In her journal, Susan describes how a student teacher arrived "with a welcome roar and a burst of needed youth and energy." Gerry also addresses this issue:

What the student brings in to you is motivation for yourself. I have been teaching the same grade for about twenty years and I think that if I hadn't had student teachers on a continual basis, that I'd probably go crazy. (Gerry, focus-group interview)

METHODS AND IDEAS. The second category that associate teachers identified as beneficial when having a student teacher concerned teaching methods and ideas. The associate teachers said they enjoyed and appreciated learning new teaching methods and ideas from student teachers. The following excerpts from Donna's journal and Gerry's focus-group interview highlight this point. "Andy had some methods which were unique and if I am to be completely honest – I probably learned more from him than vice-versa" (Donna's journal). "They help bring in new ideas and change how I do things just with their enthusiasm. I find it invigorating" (Gerry, focus-group interview).

PERSONAL GROWTH. The third benefit the associate teachers reported fell into the category identified as personal growth. Associate teachers' comments about how student teachers kept them on their toes both personally and professionally by asking them challenging questions and requiring them to reflect, question, and grow were grouped into this category. All five associate teachers repeatedly addressed this category in their journal writings, in the focus-group interview, and during individual interviews.

They [student teachers] give me an opportunity to think out loud and really work through some aspects of teaching that give me difficulty. I find that differing views help me to refine and define what I think. . . . I just like the juice it gives me in my head. (Susan's journal)

I don't think it is bad sometimes that we reinforce our own reasons for doing things. Sometimes it is very positive feedback for us too! . . . I think it is a good experience because it brings growth to yourself. And the price you pay is being tired. (Michelle, focus-group interview)

OPPORTUNITY TO OBSERVE. The associate teachers reported in the focus-group interview and in the survey that they perceived one of the benefits of having a student teacher to be that of having the opportunity to sit back and observe their students. Gerry addressed this issue during the focus-group interview.

I think what I like best about having a student teacher is that I'm able to sit and observe my students. I can't do that normally. You just sit there and watch and observe how they take in information and just view behaviours. (Gerry, focus-group interview)

Drawbacks of having a student teacher

According to the associate teachers in this study there are also several drawbacks of having a student teacher in the classroom. Having a student teacher can be very time consuming, can mean giving up power in the classroom, and can create difficulties when it comes time to evaluate the student teacher. Having a student teacher can also mean changing the children's routines, experiencing personality conflicts, and can involve different expectations. Associate teachers related these drawbacks to their relationships with their student teacher – the better they felt the relationship was, the fewer drawbacks that existed. The associate teachers also said that these drawbacks were also the stresses of having a student teacher during the teaching practicum.

TIME. Associate teachers said they felt one of the biggest drawbacks of having a student teacher was that it took a lot of time to discuss issues with them. This time took away from other things and often the associate teachers said they fell behind or stayed later at night in order to get everything done. The other aspect of time important to the associate teachers was the fact that when a student teacher was visiting their classroom, the student teacher encroached on their personal time. Both aspects of time left the associate teacher feeling stressed and tired.

The only personal stress I find is the lack of time to myself. I tend to talk fifty times more than I would normally – explaining, showing

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everything that I do automatically. And the only way I get everything done is by staying later at night. The strategies I use to alleviate this stress is kick him [student teacher] out to do errands. And leaving occasionally, when he is teaching just to have that time. (Linda, focus-group interview)

I found the most stressful thing is going from seven-thirty in the morning to five o'clock with someone there asking questions constantly. And you are still trying to get all this other stuff done. And so I just told her [student teacher], This is my time. I'll answer your questions within these other times but not at this time. I just covet my private time where I can gather my strength and rejuvenate. (Donna, individual interview)

GIVING UP POWER. Two of the associate teachers said that one of the drawbacks of having a student teacher in their classroom was that they felt stressed at choosing to give up power. These teachers also said that they try to take a back seat to student teachers and give them the freedom to experiment in their classroom.

I am feeling open and vulnerable. Sounds like a small and unimportant thing. But my position in my classroom is really all I have in terms of status as a teacher. . . . The emotional undressing. A psychological giving over of my space. We can share but the classroom is no longer my classroom. I felt a little like an intruder in my own classroom. (Susan's journal)

If someone were to rearrange my room and make drastic changes to my routine, I'm afraid I would have to struggle with not feeling that it was a personal or professional affront to my way of doing things. I suppose my biggest hurdle is to confront my own insecurities. I felt a little unnecessary at times which is just a personal problem. (Donna's journal)

The three associate teachers who did not have a problem with giving up power reported that they did not permit the student teachers to have a lot of control in their classrooms. "Keep the same routines unless you are going to be there for a long time and we have discussed it first" (Linda, focus-group interview).

Even if they want to change things, I don't know how comfortable they would be handling that change. How would they deal with the ramifications of the classroom? It may be something more than I would think they might be able to control. One of the first things the children will tell you is, 'that is not the way we usually do it!' (Michelle, focus-group interview)

EVALUATION. Evaluating the student teachers was one of the drawbacks of having a student teacher and was a source of stress for associate teachers.

Friday was an emotional roller-coaster ride. I decided to be up front with Ann and I told her that while I could sympathize with all that was going on in her life and her consequent exhaustion – that I nevertheless had to evaluate her on what went on in the classroom. To make a long story short – she ended up sobbing. After much soul searching I sent her home to bed. I left the school feeling drained and spent. (Donna's journal)

I feel uncomfortable evaluating because you have your own ideas of what a teacher should be. You are giving them a pass, but something inside you still isn't quite comfortable. And how do you justify that to yourself, or do you just have to say, I'm meeting the criteria, and just hope things eventually pan out. (Michelle, focus-group interview)

The associate teachers felt that much, but not all, of the stress of evaluation was reduced with the a pass/fail system of marking.

I found that with the last evaluation, the student teacher wanted me to indicate somewhere in the anecdotal evaluation, how she ranked. So even though the pass/fail was there, she still wanted some indication, through words, that she was exemplary. . . . She really wanted it to show that she was an 'A' without putting 'A' down. (Susan, focus-group interview)

CHANGING ROUTINES. When student teachers changed the established routines in the classroom, the associate teachers reported in the individual interviews, focus-group interview, and journals, that it was a drawback and a source of stress for them. The associate teachers felt that it took time and energy to re-establish routines after the student teacher left. Moreover, associate teachers said that their students were often affected by these changes. The amount of changes the associate teachers permitted student teachers to make in their classrooms varied among the associate teachers in this study.

It was extremely hard to watch Mary move furniture. . . . I felt a tightness a stricture in my throat. It was as if someone came into my home and began to move my furniture around. I was very quiet with Mary. Almost ignoring her eyes. I feared taking back the power that I had extended her out of pettiness. I really had to back off and evaluate what I had offered and whether I had been as genuine as I thought. (Susan's journal)

Their job is to fit in. Number one, I try not to let the student teachers stray too far from [my routines] to begin with. . . I'm afraid I'm pretty strict about keeping my routines up. Because I'm left with the pieces. (Linda, individual interview)

I think it is important to fit into the dynamics of me! When they observe me, I would think that most student teachers will try to follow the same general type of atmosphere as the teachers they are working with. (Gerry, individual interview)

EXPECTATIONS. Associate teachers reported that another drawback of the teaching practicum occurred when their expectations for the student teachers were different than what the student teacher had for themselves. In addition to causing stress, the associate teachers felt that different expectations also affected their relationship with their student teachers. The associate teachers addressed these concerns during the focus-group interview.

I had an experience where we already had a past, got along really well, and I had great expectations for the practicum. And then I think because I had such great expectations for this person, I pushed her too hard. I said, now this is where you are, and now let's make you go this little bit more, and I think it was too much. She felt this is where I am now. This is where I want to stay. . . . And unfortunately it has caused us to back off a little bit from each other. (Susan, focus-group interview)

I always come in with certain expectations of the student teacher. Sometimes some of them like to go exactly by the book. Where it says: 'By the third day you should be doing one lesson'. I'm trying to coax them into doing more than that and sometimes they're not really willing to. Then it's not off to a good start. (Gerry, focus-group interview)

DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES. The associate teachers said that a big stress of having a student teacher occurred when there was a personality conflict between themselves and the student teacher. "If it's a very strong, outspoken type person, I have more difficulty with them as a student teacher" (Gerry, focus-group interview).

If I have a student like Mary then an easy and relaxed working situation evolves naturally. If, however, I draw a student teacher with a contrary personality and an opposite approach to small children – could I cope and offer the sharing and latitude? How would my personal feelings affect the final evaluation? (Susan's journal)

If you get along with your student teacher that rapport is built quickly. And, in effect they become more effective in the classroom more quickly. Whereas, if it takes longer for that rapport to develop with the student, their effectiveness in the classroom is also affected. (Michelle, focus-group interview)

Moreover, the associate teachers said that their relationship with their student teacher affected how they evaluated them.

Being in a role of an evaluator is very uncomfortable for me. . . . If you don't mesh quickly . . . then it is harder to communicate and get your ideas across. And when it comes time to evaluate, I still try to be objective. . . . but it is hard, and it does affect evaluations. (Donna, individual interview)

I think the evaluation is really subjective. No matter how hard you try not to be, if everything is working well between the two of you, I think you are going to evaluate a lot more positively than if you have had difficulty creating that relationship. I think then you are going to have to struggle to be fair and just in your evaluation. I don't care who you are. (Susan, individual interview)

Coping strategies

The associate teachers identified two strategies they used for coping with stress: talking with peers, and establishing an area to focus on during the teaching practicum.

TALKING WITH PEERS. One coping strategy associate teachers reported for dealing with the stress caused by having a student teacher in their classroom was talking with peers.

If I was thinking about some things that were bugging me in my mind, I may talk to Donna. When an Aid is in my classroom, I would talk to my Aid. . . . If it is something really serious, I might go and talk to the principal. I have done that once. (Susan, individual interview)

I also talk with other people which I probably shouldn't. I mean, having a husband that teaches, or having a teacher's Aid where I can say, "This is really bothering me. Now how do I get this across to him?" (Linda, individual interview)

COMMUNICATING A FOCUS. The associate teachers reported that another coping strategy they used for dealing with stress was establishing what specific things will be focused on during the practicum and communicating this with the student teacher.

I usually begin the practicum by asking them if they have a focus for the practicum. Because if they have a particular focus then I try to work to that in addition to everything else depending on which practicum it is. . . . (Michelle, focus-group interview)

The first way to get rid of stress . . . make a calendar for the two or three weeks the student teacher will be here. And map out exactly what they are going to do – which programs I want to keep going and

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where the student teacher has flexibility of putting in their own creative interest. (Gerry, individual interview)

The strategies the associate teachers said the faculty has implemented or could implement to reduce stress included: pass/fail evaluation; more faculty observations; longer practicums; theory; contacting the associate; and etiquette and hierarchy.

PASS/FAIL EVALUATION. The associate teachers reported in their individual interviews and the focus-group interviews that the pass/fail evaluation system which had been recently implemented reduced the stress caused by the evaluation process during the teaching practicum.

I think it [pass/fail system] is just more honest. Where they have to go, rather than what they've achieved so far. I think it is more appropriate. (Michelle, focus-group interview)

I found the stress just came right off when there was no A, B, C – it has changed the relationship between the student teacher and me and it allows more flexibility. There isn't that constant: 'I want to please you to get my A.' (Linda, focus-group interview)

FACULTY ADVISOR OBSERVATIONS. The associate teachers unanimously agreed that it would be of greater value and support to them if the faculty advisor observed the student teachers teach for longer periods of the day and on more occasions. The teachers in this study were totally responsible for evaluating the student teachers. Other than the support the faculty advisor provides, there is no formal training for this process. The associate teachers suggested that the faculty advisor should observe the student teachers teach for at least a quarter of the day, and preferably for half the day to be effective.

I'd find it extremely supportive. It is nice to have feedback. This isolation business . . . and then there is the danger of becoming too subjective. When you have someone else who can look at what is going on objectively and you can talk with all three people involved, I would find that very beneficial. (Donna, focus-group interview)

If we have concerns for the evaluation, then we have someone who is supporting us. Instead of the student teacher going back to the university and saying: 'Well, I just didn't get along with the teacher!' But if the faculty advisor is there and shares similar concerns with the teacher, then the teacher doesn't feel like, 'I'm the bad guy!' (Susan, focus-group interview)

LONGER PRACTICUM. The associate teachers who had experienced four-week practicums as opposed to two-week practicums reported that the longer time permitted more opportunity to develop relationships and reduced the stress of the teaching practicum.

I find that I am much more relaxed knowing that Carol will be here for the next four weeks instead of two. Two weeks is such a short time to establish routines, a rapport with the children, a plan of action etc. (Donna's journal)

I've had about twenty-two student teachers and two years ago I had a student who came for two weeks and then wanted to come back for the next two. I was very apprehensive about having him. I didn't know whether I had much more to offer him. . . And yet, he came back, and it was probably one of the best two-week sessions I've ever had. It was just marvelous! He went from where we left off and went up. (Gerry, focus-group interview)

THEORY. Two of the associate teachers reported that they were sometimes justifying to their student teachers the importance of theory to balance the teacher preparation year. Often the associate teachers felt that student teachers were not convinced of the importance of the theoretical grounding of their practice and the university must emphasize this point even further. Donna discussed this issue during the focus-group interview: "Somehow student teachers have to be convinced that this [theory] is just as much of a priority as the practicum is."

There is something I get from student teachers who feel like the classroom situation is exactly what they want and the University isn't fulfilling their needs. There is almost an arrogance about them . . . And I feel like I am doing a selling job for the university saying, 'You do need that. Go back and ask questions and find out about that. Because when you get into the classroom you are going to have to answer questions to parents.' (Susan, focus-group interview)

CONTACTING THE ASSOCIATE. The associate teachers reported in the focus-group interview that when student teachers contact them early, prior to their placement, it establishes better relationships between them and reduces the stress of the teaching practicum. The associate teachers felt that the university faculty could easily inform student teachers of this suggested contact time.

The time line in which the student teacher contacts the teacher prior to the placement has a big influence on how things get off in the beginning. If you have met this person, maybe two of three weeks prior to the practicum, and discussed things. . . . To get the mind set. I know they have other things but this is a priority, and I feel it shouldn't be the last week before they come into the school. (Michelle, focus-group interview)

SCHOOL ETIQUETTE AND HIERARCHY. The associate teachers reported in the focus-group interview that it was the job of the university to better prepare the student teachers for the etiquette and hierarchy they will

encounter in the schools. They felt that proper etiquette and fitting into the hierarchy of the school would establish better relationships for the student teacher within the school, and reduce stress for both the associate teacher and the student teacher.

I think there should be some sort of discussion at the university level on social etiquette. There is a hierarchy in the school – let's face it. . . . Some student teachers just come in and expect 'I'm here! I'm equal to you!' (Linda, focus-group interview)

If a student teacher comes in and isn't sensitive to the hierarchy and etiquette of the school it can have big ramifications. I had a student teacher who sort of bulldozed in and took advantage of things that went on in the staff room – treats and coffee, and didn't realize that he needed to contribute or say thank you. And it got the principal angry. And that principal chewed him out really good. Which surprised the student. (Susan, focus-group interview)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Associate teachers describe having a student teacher in their classroom as a two-edged sword – although there are benefits, there are also drawbacks. Moreover, these benefits and drawbacks are often dependent on the relationship the associate teachers have with their student teachers. When the associate teachers perceive the relationship between themselves and the student teacher as being good, there are more benefits and similarly fewer drawbacks.

It is interesting to note that the greatest amount of stress was felt with the associate teachers who allowed the student teachers to “take over, experiment, and implement changes” in their classroom. Maintaining control over their classroom, keeping the same physical lay out, the same routines, and allowing the student teacher to work within the parameters set by the associate teacher, reduced the stress experienced by the associate teachers in this study. Only two of the five associate teachers reported that they permitted this freedom. Ironically, these were the two associate teachers who experienced the most stress. They were also the two associate teachers who were the researcher/participants. The obvious question that arises from this observation is to what extent being involved in the research influenced Kathy and Susan's practices during the teaching practicum. It could be that the reading, questioning, reflection, and analyzing that Kathy and Susan were required to do during this study influenced their practice. On the other hand, however, the reason Susan and Kathy were approached to help

conduct research in the first place was because they were more open to student teachers.

There were no obvious differences in the responses of the man and women associate teachers in this study. Moreover, the limited sample size (five and only one of the five being a man) limits drawing direct inferences or conclusions on gender issues.

This study has ramifications for faculties of education. According to the associate teachers in this study, the stress of the teaching practicum could be greatly reduced with the assistance of the faculties of education. The strategies the associate teachers said the faculty has implemented or could implement to reduce stress included: pass/fail evaluation; extended practicum; more and longer faculty observations; theory; contacting the associate teacher; and etiquette and hierarchy.

The associate teachers said that the pass/fail system of evaluation introduced reduced the stress since it was perceived to be a more flexible, honest approach. However, the question of subjectivity, responsibility, and the meeting of criteria remains a crucial concern. Are associate teachers more effective evaluators as a result of this system, or is it simply less stressful because the parameters are less clearly defined and are not subject to personal interpretation?

The longer practicum reduced stress for associate teachers. The literature suggests that student teachers progress through a developmental sequence moving from survival concerns, to teaching situation concerns, to concerns for student needs (Housego, 1987). In a short practicum, student teachers may not progress beyond the first stage. In this case, they may not be ready or able to make the connections between theory and practice.

Finally, the associate teachers felt that it was the job of the faculties of education to inform student teachers of the requested contact time prior to the teaching placement and to better prepare them about school etiquette and hierarchy of the school. They said they believed this communication would facilitate the development of better relationships between associate teacher and student teacher and reduce the stress of the teaching practicum for both.

It would seem that while faculties of education can alleviate some of the stresses perceived by associate teachers, there are areas of concern which remain. The various perceptions of expectations for the student teacher expressed by the associate teachers, and the issues surrounding

evaluation and theory suggest that if there is to be a cohesive, comprehensive, and quality program of teacher education that the need for a long-term, process-oriented collaboration between faculties of education and school boards needs to be considered (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990).

Classroom teachers need time and commitment to develop the necessary understandings, skills, and orientations, and schools must broaden the scope of teachers roles' and rewards to include teacher education. (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1987, p. 257)

Although the limited sample size of this research study does not permit definitive conclusions, the trends and themes which emerged support the literature on teaching practicums and suggest areas for further research and exploration. Having associate teachers involved in developing questions, interviewing, and the analysis of data, insured that the questions and issues that were important to the associate teachers were addressed. Having two associate teachers involved as both researchers and participants presented an interesting perspective. These teachers were involved in making up the questions for the survey and interviews and then answering their own questions as well as administering the questions to their peers.

All five associate teachers completed the survey in great detail and spoke approximately the same amount of time during the interviews. However, the data suggest that the two teachers who acted as both researcher and participant made more connections between their ideas and the literature. For these two teachers, the research experience seemed to present them with more questions than it answered. These two teachers also seem more affected by the research project. They made more attempts to be open to student teachers' needs, to change their practices, and reflect on events and situations. This is probably partially due to both the related readings, and the analytical meetings in which these two associate teachers were involved (and the other three associate teachers were not). Moreover, by collaborating in the analysis of the data with the associate teachers, the data may have been interpreted from a different angle. By involving associate teachers as researchers in this study as opposed to "subjects to be researched", we were able to move toward better understanding their perspective on having a student teacher in the classroom. The following excerpt from Susan's narrative account of the collaborative research project highlights this point:

And so here I am, a primary teacher struggling to bring the 'teacher's voice' to the research. One who is beginning to appreciate the potential of collaborative work, and who is discovering the power of narrative written from an ordinary classroom teacher's perspective. The research experience that I have gained through this work is invaluable and I will reap the benefits next winter as I toil away in my classroom working on my own thesis. The flexibility of the arrangement meant that I could determine my own schedule, my own level of commitment and work out of my own classroom. I am now more familiar and comfortable with qualitative research, designing a survey, developing and conducting a focus-group interview, an individual interview, and keeping and sharing a personal journal. I understand the rigors of sifting through data to discover trends and themes – to let the data speak for itself. I was empowered to have a voice in a process that directly impacts my career. And I understand the strength and support that exists in collaboration. (Stewart et al., 1994, p. 345)

Many of the findings from this research project support the findings in the literature on the teaching practicum. Moreover, the majority of the findings have already been documented in the literature. What sets this research apart from other studies is the fact that the research design involved teachers as researchers. The detailed description of the methodology itself described from the teacher/researcher point of view may be insightful to other researchers considering collaborative research between faculties of education and school boards. An interesting follow-up study would be an investigation which examined if a project researched by associate teachers presents different information and interpretations than a project researched by a university professor. Finally, an investigation to explore to what extent being involved in research influences classroom teachers' practices would also be a logical follow-up study to evolve from this research.

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