

ED344873 1992-05-00 Supervision of Student Teachers. ERIC Digest.

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ERIC Identifier: ED344873

Publication Date: 1992-05-00

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Source: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education Washington DC.

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THE SUPERVISORY TRIAD

The student teaching field experience is an essential component of learning to teach

and supervision plays an important role (Zahorik, 1988). During this time, the student teacher is assigned to a school-based cooperating teacher and a university supervisor, all of whom form a supervisory triad. Educators consider student teaching to be an important, highly valued experience. It is "critical to the development of preservice teachers' pedagogical skills" (Richardson-Koehler, 1988, p. 22). Seventy-seven percent of the university supervisors and 70% of the cooperating teachers support the notion that student teaching prepares students more than adequately for their first full-time teaching job (AACTE, 1991).

While university supervisors and cooperating teachers share the goal of preparing students to be effective teachers, they differ in their perspectives on the learning processes that take place. Emphasizing seminar work, 69% of university supervisors feel that students are adequately prepared for student teaching, compared to only 49% of cooperating teachers, who stress practical experience as an important factor in a student teacher's preparedness (AACTE, 1991).

The discrepancy between university supervisors' and teachers' perspectives, between theory and practice, has led some critics to doubt that the current practice of student teaching is effective (Evertson, Howley, & Zlotnik, 1984). They are concerned that student teachers simply model the behavior of their cooperating teachers and may not learn as much of the theoretical and general principles that would allow them to teach in a variety of classroom situations (Richardson-Koehler, 1988). Dewey (1904 in Zahorik, 1988) already cautioned that student teachers' close contact with the cooperating teacher may prevent them from developing reflective inquiry skills. While student teachers need exemplary models, they must also learn to become independent thinkers, grasping principles and developing new techniques.

Cleary (1988) suggests that this could be resolved by providing better supervision of student teachers; however, it is a complex process. This ERIC Digest considers the barriers to improved student teacher supervision, identifies approaches to overcoming such barriers, and describes collaborative efforts in which public school and university personnel are equal partners.

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE SUPERVISION

The concept of effective supervision is much debated and difficult to define (Boydell, 1986). Incongruent role expectations by cooperating teachers and university supervisors (Applegate & Lasley, 1986), lack of substantive communication, and lack of collaboration appear to be the main factors hampering the process (Bhagat, Clark, & Combs, 1989; Hoover, O'Shea, & Carroll, 1988).



INCONGRUENT ROLE EXPECTATIONSThe roles of cooperating teachers and

university supervisors are ambiguous and not always clearly defined (Richardson-Koehler, 1988; Grimmert & Ratzlaff, 1986). Although the research literature (Zahorik, 1988) identifies different roles that supervisors assume, supervisors do not necessarily reflect on or communicate them. This likely leads to misunderstanding in interactions with their counterparts, particularly, if the university supervisor and the cooperating teacher assume different roles (Wood, 1989). Zahorik (1988) identifies three supervisory roles:

- * behavior prescriber--emphasizes students' acquisition of basic instructional skills and classroom management techniques;
- * idea interpreter--presents beliefs about what classrooms and schools ought to be like and suggests ways to bring about change; and
- * person supporter--promotes students' own decision-making and encourages them to think for themselves.

Despite these apparently well-defined roles, the cooperating teacher seems to be most influential because of his/her close interaction with the student (Richardson-Koehler, 1986; American Association, 1991). Some have suggested eliminating the role of the university supervisor, who exerts less immediate influence on the student teacher (Bowman, 1979 cited in Wood, 1989; Zahorik, 1988). Marrou (1989) and Wood (1989), however, stress the significance of the university supervisor's role as critical, but not as one that duplicates the observing and evaluating role of the cooperating teacher. Scholars have suggested the university supervisor's role as someone who acts as personal confidant to the cooperating teacher and student teacher (Zimpher, DeVoss, & Nott, 1980) or who manages the administrative, managerial, and technical aspects of supervision rather than the instructional or personal (Wood, 1989).



LACK OF COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATIONLack of substantive communication and collaboration (Bhagat et al., 1989) complicates the supervisory process. Limited in their interactions by time constraints because of teaching and research responsibilities (AACTE, 1991; Hoover et al., 1988), university supervisors and cooperating teachers do not effectively communicate about their respective expectations of the goals of student teaching; the instructional approaches with which student teachers should experiment (Bhagat et al., 1989; Richardson-Koehler, 1988; Zahorik, 1988); or the purpose, policies, and practices that guide student teaching (Hoover et al., 1988). As a result, cooperating teachers and university supervisors often misunderstand each other, lack unity in front of the student teacher, and continue to teach and supervise the way they always have instead of working as a supervisory team (Moon, Niemeyer, & Simmons, 1988).

OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS

Depending on the perceived cause for the unsuccessful supervision of student teachers, efforts designed to overcome these barriers have included:

- * training for university supervisors to reconceptualize their roles (Boydell, 1986);
- * training for cooperating teachers to analyze their own teaching and supervisory techniques (Richardson-Koehler, 1988); and
- * selecting and matching the triad members in a systematic way (Wood, 1989).

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

A prominent part of the recent reform agenda calls for cooperating teachers and university supervisors to work as equal partners and in projects that link universities and school districts (Kirchhoff, 1989). At the University of New Hampshire, cooperating teachers, building principals, and university supervisors work together. Cooperating teachers learn more about the theoretical side of teacher education and are better able to match supervisory styles to the developmental stages of the preservice teachers. Principals incorporate newly acquired knowledge into their role as instructional leaders. University supervisors use their new insights to work more collaboratively with the cooperating teachers as they share supervision responsibility (see Oja, 1988). In 1989 Ohio State University, the local public schools, and the state education association initiated a program where fully released public school teachers share the supervision of student teachers with university supervisors. The university supervisor and teacher meet weekly to discuss student teachers' progress, communicating on a continuous basis and working as a team, linking theory and practice for the preservice teachers (see Zimpher, 1988; Kirchhoff, 1989).

CONCLUSION

The benefits of collaborative efforts are manifold and enrich each triad member. Student teachers have the opportunity to incorporate fully both the theoretical and the practical into their teaching. Additionally, the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor create a working relationship based on mutual respect and understanding for each others' expertise, perspectives, and roles.

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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education, under contract number RI88062015. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the Department.

Title: Supervision of Student Teachers. ERIC Digest.

Document Type: Information Analyses---ERIC Information Analysis Products (IAPs) (071); Information Analyses---ERIC Digests (Selected) in Full Text (073);

Descriptors: College School Cooperation, Cooperating Teachers, Demonstration Programs, Elementary Secondary Education, Higher Education, Preservice Teacher Education, Program Improvement, Student Teacher Supervisors, Student Teachers, Student Teaching, Supervisory Methods, Supervisory Training

Identifiers: ERIC Digests, Ohio State University, University of New Hampshire
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