DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 439 105 SP 039 056

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TITLE Inquiring Minds Want To Know: Does the Clinical Supervision Course Improve Cooperating Teachers' Supervisory Performance?

PUB DATE 2000-02-14

NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators (80th, Orlando, FL, February 13-16, 2000).

PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS *Clinical Supervision (of Teachers); *Cooperating Teachers; Elementary Secondary Education; Faculty Development; *Feedback; Higher Education; Inservice Teacher Education; Observation; Preservice Teacher Education; Student Teachers; *Supervisory Methods; Supervisory Training; Teacher Improvement

IDENTIFIERS Supervisor Supervisee Relationship

ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of a clinical supervision course on cooperating teachers' supervision of student teachers. Participants were cooperating teachers enrolled in a clinical supervision class in which supervision strategies were introduced and modeled. Before supervision theories and techniques were introduced, participants completed interviews that asked how they provided feedback to student teachers. Most reported using informal conversation, and some indicated formal observations. Throughout the course, the instructor introduced and modeled several observation strategies: selective verbatim, verbal flow, at task, class traffic, interaction analysis, anecdotal notes, global technique, narrative technique, and observation checklist. Cooperating teachers were not mandated to try every strategy as part of the course. During the semester following the course, 11 participants worked with student teachers. Researchers observed a post-observation conference by each cooperating teacher to determine whether any of the techniques from class were evident. Six cooperating teachers implemented only one newly learned supervisory technique after the course ended. Ten cooperating teachers continued to implement techniques they had used prior to the supervision course. Teachers reported that the course helped clarify what the university wanted its students to accomplish and what assistance was available to them in working with student teachers. (Contains 14 references.) (SM)

Inquiring Minds Want to Know: Does the Clinical Supervision Course Improve Cooperating Teachers' Supervisory Performance?

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Paper Presented at the 80th Annual Meeting of the
Association of Teacher Educators
Orlando, Florida
February 14, 2000

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to share findings of a preliminary study designed to explore the effects of a clinical supervision course on a group of cooperating teachers' supervisory practice with their student teachers.

Inquiring Minds Want to Know: Does the Clinical Supervision Course Improve Cooperating Teachers' Supervisory Performance?

The critical role a cooperating teacher plays in teacher education programs has been repeatedly emphasized in the literature (Blocker & Swetnam, 1995; Bradley & Earp, 1964; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Karmos & Jacko, 1976; Kingen, 1984; Morehead & Waters, 1987; Sparks & Brodeur, 1987). A variety of studies have tried to identify certain characteristics and qualities needed to be an effective cooperating teacher. Hayes (1966) recommends that all cooperating teachers should possess the following general skills: a) the ability to demonstrate effective teaching; b) the ability to analyze teaching; c) the ability to guide teaching; and d) the ability to evaluate teaching. However, the literature review reveals that supervisory training of cooperating teachers has never been a priority on the agenda for most teacher education programs.

Kingen (1984) surveyed 62 institutional members of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education to determine the criteria used for selecting cooperating teachers. She found that course work in supervision was infrequently noted as a criterion for selection. In their status report on the selection and evaluation of cooperating teachers in a mid-western state, Blocker and Swetnam (1995) also confirmed that the majority of institutions do not require cooperating teachers to take a supervision inservice or course, and in many cases do not even offer such a class (p. 24).

Several studies have suggested that cooperating teachers need sufficient training in supervisory practices to work with student teachers (Killian, McIntyre, & Wheeler, 1987; Wilkens-Canter, 1997; Young & Copenhaver, 1996). It would seem reasonable that cooperating teachers know what roles they are to perform and what skills they are to encourage. Ganser (1996), suggested that the roles and responsibilities of the cooperating teacher must be clearly defined. He suggested that without a clear definition, a cooperating teacher typically constructs a definition of roles and responsibilities

often based on his or her own experiences as a student teacher (p. 285).

Teacher education programs can no longer afford to expect the cooperating teachers to supervise the inexperienced field students if they are untrained in observation and supervisory skills. The concern is how much impact does a supervision course have on the cooperating teacher's actual performance in supervision, if it is offered in a teacher education program. There is very little research that addresses this issue.

In this particular study, we addressed the following two questions: a) Did clinical supervision techniques improve the cooperating teacher's supervisory skills? and b) Did the cooperating teacher systematically apply newly acquired knowledge of clinical supervision when working with student teachers? This particular study was a preliminary, informal investigation. The findings may be considered tentative until a thorough examination is conducted.

We asked for voluntary participation from a group of cooperating teachers who had been enrolled in a clinical supervision class between 1996 and 1998 in which supervision strategies were introduced and modeled. (See Appendix A) Fourteen K-12 teachers from three school districts agreed to participate. Their teaching experience ranged from three to 22 years in the classroom. All but one had worked with student teachers at the time they were enrolled in the supervision course for cooperating teachers. Before varying theories of supervision and techniques were introduced, participants were interviewed. They were asked "How do you provide feedback to your student teacher?" The cooperating teachers reported that informal conversation was the way they provided feedback to their student teachers. The cooperating teachers described informal conversation as informal discussions with the student teacher regarding his/her lesson preparation, implementation, and lesson effectiveness/ineffectiveness. Three participants indicated that they had also observed their student teachers formally a couple of times over the semester. They did so by recording effective/ineffective instructional techniques and/or effective/ineffective classroom management techniques

implemented by the student teacher throughout his/her lesson presentation. At the time, the cooperating teachers were unaware that they had used one of the supervision techniques by Acheson and Gall (1992) referred to as a "wide lens approach" or "global technique."

Throughout the course, the instructor introduced and modeled the following observation strategies: a) selective verbatim, b) verbal flow, c) at task, d) class traffic, e) interaction analysis, f) anecdotal notes (or script tape), g) global technique, h) narrative technique, and i) observation checklist. (See Appendix B) The instructor did not mandate that the cooperating teachers try every strategy with their student teachers they were currently mentoring as part of the course assignment. The analysis of the observation notes revealed that three cooperating teachers experimented with global technique, one applied selective verbatim, and three chose to experiment with both global and selective verbatim. (See Appendix C)

During the semester following the course, eleven participants were working with student teachers. The researchers observed a post-observation conference conducted by each cooperating teacher to find out whether any of the techniques taught in class were evident. Our observation of the post-conferences and follow-up interviews indicated that only one cooperating teacher added global and selective verbatim techniques to his mentoring process. Two continued to use the global technique they had used before taking the supervision class. The cooperating teachers acknowledged that they felt good about being able to use supervisory techniques and for being on the "right" track of supervision. Two of the cooperating teachers chose not to use the selective verbatim technique they had practiced during the class, but rather implemented the global technique with their student teachers. Although the cooperating teachers thought that the selective verbatim technique was a very valuable one, they stated that time was a key issue for not applying the technique. The cooperating teachers also stated that they embraced the global technique because it was non-threatening to their student teachers and relatively easy to do. Five of the

cooperating teachers did not make any changes in their supervision after the class. Again, they indicated that there was too little time.

Overall, we found that six of the cooperating teachers implemented only one newly learned supervisory technique after the course ended. We also found that 10 of the cooperating teachers continued to implement techniques they had used with their student teachers prior to taking the supervision class. However, the teachers did report that the course helped clarify what the university wanted its students to accomplish and what assistance was available to them in working with student teachers.

The results failed to convince us that cooperating teachers systematically apply newly acquired knowledge of clinical supervision when working with student teachers. We suggested that the following reasons might help explain why a course designed for improving cooperating teachers' supervisory skills did not realize its intended objectives and what teacher education programs might do.

First, cooperating teachers do not feel comfortable assuming the role of supervisor because they do not feel that one course is sufficient to prepare them for this particular role. Perhaps a more systematic approach to the training and application would enable cooperating teachers to know what they are expected to do and why they are expected to do it. It is not only important to provide the cooperating teachers with the theory of supervision, but it is vastly important for them to apply and practice what they have learn.

Second, although the cooperating teachers believe it is beneficial to be exposed to a variety of supervisory techniques, the application of those techniques can simply overwhelm them due to their lack of proficiency. Perhaps the university supervisor could provide moral and physical support by meeting with cooperating teachers periodically for renewed training and mutual communication.

Third, cooperating teachers admitted that the supervisory skills were important and beneficial, but often failed to implement them because of time constraints. Many times cooperating teachers are busy with other students in the classroom, addressing clerical

responsibilities, and in many cases, co-teaching with the another teacher and/or the student teacher and simply cannot find the time to implement the supervisory techniques. Perhaps the cooperating teacher could choose one class period during the day to implement a supervisory technique with no interruptions. This time could vary from day to day according to the subject matter being taught in order to observe the student teacher teaching a wide range of subjects. The cooperating teacher may have to find time during the school day when he/she provides some type of systematic feedback to the student based on a supervision technique.

Fourth, cooperating teachers often lack mentoring skills and the ability to effectively communicate with their student teacher. Cooperating teachers must be taught how to be an effective mentor teacher. They must be familiar with the specific roles and responsibilities of a mentor. Additionally, cooperating teachers must be able to systematically provide feedback to their student teachers that is done so in a consistent, pertinent, professional, and non-threatening manner. Simply knowing a variety of supervisory techniques and how to implement them does not make a cooperating teacher an effective mentor or communicator. Perhaps training in effective communication skills as well as mentoring skills may be beneficial to both the cooperating teacher and the student teacher.

Preservice teachers spend a significant amount of time working with their cooperating teachers, especially during the student teaching experience. Effective supervisory skills on the part of cooperating teacher are very likely to make or break a student teacher. We hope these findings will help direct attention to the type of supervisory training that is sometimes provided for the cooperating teacher.

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Appendix A

Clinical Supervision Course Objectives

The course is designed to:

1. Increase your skills in supervision of novice and inservice teachers;

2. Help you learn effective methods for providing oral and written feedback to teachers at all levels;

3. Help you develop strategies for the socialization of novice teachers into the profession;

4. Improve your post-observation conferencing skills;

5. Provide a forum for the exchange of teacher supervision issues and concerns;

6. Help you brainstorm solutions to supervision problems;

7. Allow you to develop a systematic plan for involvement, observation, conferencing, and assessment of classroom teachers;

8. Facilitate a review of research and philosophies regarding supervision of instruction;

9. Increase your self-confidence as a teacher educator and mentor of apprentice teachers; and to

10. Help you reflect about and enhance your own classroom teaching practices.

Appendix B

Supervision Strategies by Acheson and Gall (1992)

The course introduced and modeled the following observation strategies:

1. Selective Verbatim - words that were actually said (by teachers or students) that can be written down; focusing on selected communication (i.e., teacher's positive reinforcement, teacher's questions, etc.)

2. Verbal Flow - marking on a seating chart who spoke (also, in a more sophisticated form, how often and when); recording who is talking to whom; verbal interaction between teacher and students

3. At Task - a time-sampling method for noting periodically over time who appears to be attending to the task the teacher has set; systematically noting the behavior of each student at regular intervals during the lesson

4. Class Traffic - tracking the teacher's (or students') physical movement around the classroom

5. Interaction Analysis - charting categories of verbal behavior over time within the lesson; who said what (kind of statement) to whom and when. This can be coded on a timeline with categories such as "expression of feelings," "praise," "encouragement," "questions," "lecture," "directions," "criticism," "antagonism"

6. Anecdotal Notes - what was happening altogether (in the view, or perception of the observer) noted briefly. The notes can identify who, what, where, and when. Inferring and concluding "why" goes beyond analysis and become judgment or evaluation.

[May also be referred to as Script Tape - making brief notes of events as they occur in the classroom (i.e., teacher action and student action, procedures, timeline, etc.)]

7. Global Technique - implementing a wide angle lens approach; no particular area of focus; capturing and recording a large number of teaching phenomena

8. Narrative Technique - recording like a video; record teacher action and student reaction at a set interval of time

9. Observation Checklist - focusing on basic elements of a lesson plan and instruction

Appendix C

Table 1

Cooperating Teachers Trained in Supervision Techniques

Teacher	Gender	Grade Level	Teaching Experience	Years With Preservice Students	Supervision Techniques BEFORE Training	Supervision Techniques DURING Training	Supervision Techniques AFTER Training
Fred	M	Sp.Ed. H/S	22	18	Global Technique Conversation	Global Technique Conversation	Global Technique Conversation
Sue	M	Lang. Arts 7-8	19	8	Conversation	Global Technique Conversation	Global Technique Conversation Selective Verbatim
Chris	F	Art 1-8	14	11	Conversation	Conversation	Conversation
Deb	F	Reading K-8	17	5	Global Technique Conversation	N/A	N/A
Lynne	F	Sp.Ed. K-8	15	10	Conversation	Global Technique Conversation	Global Technique Conversation
Kathy	F	Speech Pre K-8	15	10	Conversation	Global Technique Conversation Selective Verbatim	Global Technique Conversation
Cheryl	F	Sp.Ed. K-4	8	3	Conversation	Global Technique Conversation Selective Verbatim	N/A

Appendix C

Table 1

Cooperating Teachers Trained in Supervision Techniques (con't)

Teacher	Gender	Grade Level	Teaching Experience	Years With Preservice Students	Supervision Techniques BEFORE Training	Supervision Techniques DURING Training	Supervision Techniques AFTER Training
Bob	M	Sixth	5	0	N/A	N/A	Global Technique Conversation
Emma	F	Third	15	11	Conversation	Conversation Selective Verbatim	Conversation Global Technique
Debbie	F	Third	17	13	Conversation	Conversation	Conversation
Beth	F	Third	11	3	Conversation	Conversation	Conversation
Cathy	F	Multi-Age 2/3	10	4	Global Technique Conversation	Global Technique Conversation	Global Technique Conversation
Terry	F	Kindergarten	5	3	Conversation	Conversation Global Technique	Conversation Global Technique
Lynette	F	Kindergarten	3	1	Conversation	Global Technique Conversation Selective Verbatim	N/A

NA - Information is Not Available as there is/was no Preservice Student working in that particular classroom.
Conversation - CT informally discusses lesson preparation, implementation, and the lesson effectiveness/ineffectiveness with the Preservice Student.
Global Technique - CT records effective/ineffective instructional techniques and/or effective/ineffective classroom management techniques implemented by the Preservice Student throughout the lesson presentation.
Selective Verbatim - CT records positive reinforcement or questioning techniques implemented by the Preservice Student throughout the lesson presentation.

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