

The Shared Supervision of Student Teachers: Leadership, Listening, and Lessons Learned

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Abstract

Professional Development Schools provide many different opportunities for the supervision of pre-service teacher. One of these options is the Shared Supervision of student teachers in which the university faculty member and the supervising classroom teacher now work together to complete observations, provide feedback, and complete summative evaluations of the student teachers' progress. This method of supervision was recently adopted in an elementary PDS, and this manuscript details how Shared Supervision was implemented, as well as recommendations for improvement in future programs.

The supervision of student teachers has always been a concern of teacher preparation institutions. Providing the appropriate number of observations, adequate supervision, and feedback to pre-service teachers is of utmost importance in the preparation of future teachers. However, with concerns about preparing qualified teachers, meeting state and national standards, and increasing budget constraints, providing this service has become an even more important aspect of teacher preparation. Many universities utilize the "circuit rider" approach to supervising student teachers, where the university supervisor travels from school to school with minimal contact with the school or classroom to which the student teacher has been assigned. With this approach, the university supervisor makes infrequent visits, and the university spends a great deal of money on travel and mileage expenses for the supervisors assigned this duty. While this custom is used by a majority of universities, the practice of supervision in Professional Development Schools (PDS) has changed greatly in many teacher preparation programs.

Professional development schools according to Abdal-Haqq (1998) are defined as partnerships between schools and a university which have the following goals; rethinking the preparation of pre-service teachers, providing professional development for teachers, modeling exemplary practices that will lead to increased student achievement,

and providing inquiry for students and faculty (p. vi). Along with creating partnerships with universities, PDS sites focus on restructuring the traditional roles of supervising pre-service teachers. This change of supervisory practices is a necessary part of the PDS function, and especially relates to a change in roles and structures in the area of teacher preparation. According to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards for Professional Development Schools (2001), Professional Development Schools must focus on five major standards. These include:

- Developing a learning community that supports the integrated learning and development of P-12 students, candidates, and PDS partners through inquiry-based practice.
- Being accountable to the PDS partners and the public for upholding the professional standards for teaching and learning.
- Collaborating with partner institutions to move from independent to interdependent partners by committing themselves and making a commitment to each other to joint work focusing on the PDS mission.
- Developing and demonstrating knowledge, skills, and dispositions resulting in learning for all P-12 students and ensuring a diverse learning community for PDS work.

- Articulating resources and establishing governing structures that support the learning and development of P-12 students, candidates, faculty and other professionals. (NCATE, 2001)

One of the major elements of the last standard includes recreating and modifying existing roles in the area of teacher education. In this study, the roles and structures were examined and the structure of PDS supervision has been changed greatly due to the school–university partnership that has been established. Several areas were restructured, and the traditional roles of supervision were revamped in a number of ways. University supervisors, now called liaisons, work with a larger group of student teachers who are placed together in a PDS for their student teaching experience. These liaisons still supervise student teachers but also provide services to the school such as participation on school committees, professional development activities, and occasional substitute teaching. While the university liaison spends time in the school completing supervision activities, the supervising teachers in a PDS also serve in many roles doing more supervision of student teachers, sharing information at seminars for the pre-service teachers, and participating in activities related to teacher preparation at the university level. Such changes in the roles of the stakeholders involved in the Professional Development Schools, are just one concept that varies from a traditional teacher training setting.

With this model, changes in the preparation of teachers have been implemented including a change in the supervisory practices. One such idea includes the shared supervision of student teachers by both the university and classroom supervisors. The shared supervision model assumes that the person most qualified to observe and monitor the growth of a student teacher is the person they most encounter on a daily basis—the cooperating teacher. This coincides with the University of Memphis Professional Development Schools Model which states:

Our PDS model acknowledges that the person most qualified to take the lead in preparing the student teacher may not be the university liaison, but rather the cooperating teacher. Why is this so? Because no matter how much involvement the university liaison has with the school, the cooperating teacher undoubtedly has a greater degree of involvement with the student teacher. The cooperating teacher is the one, who, day after day, watches the student teacher at work and provides the student teacher with constant and appropriate feedback. (Morris, Nunnery, Taylor, Knight, Brooks, 2000, p. 97)

With the assumption that the cooperating teacher has the knowledge and expertise necessary to provide feedback and support to a pre-service teacher, many universities are moving to a more cooperative model of supervision during the student teaching phase of teacher preparation. Hall, Chance, and Rakes (2000) agree that the roles in the PDS are quite different than in traditional supervision models:

The roles of the cooperating teacher and the university supervisor (or liaison) are quite different. In regular school sites, the university supervisor is not involved in in-service or group meetings but is still viewed as the primary evaluator of the student teacher. In professional development schools, the university liaison is involved in weekly meetings with student teachers but is not considered the primary evaluator. The cooperating teacher takes the lead in the evaluation process. The university liaison in a PDS uses the student teaching evaluation folder, but does not typically sit in the classroom for an hour formally observing a complete lesson. Instead a snapshot evaluation is substituted. (p. 115)

By changing the roles of the liaison and classroom supervisor, and empowering the classroom teacher to have more responsibility for the preparation

of the student teachers, the shared supervision model can be an effective way to evaluate student teachers. It can also increase the effectiveness of the experienced educators, as well as the university liaison assigned to the PDS.

In research by Teitel (2001) about the effectiveness of Professional Development Schools, the impact of PDSs has been measured in several studies. A summary of this research indicates that:

For school-based faculty, professional development follows from an expansion of roles, a stretching of new teaching methods, and a broader conceptualization of the role and definition of teacher. Successful involvement with pre-service teachers can expand the possibilities for teacher leadership, growth, and professionalism. Exposure to new ideas can expand the teaching repertoires of experienced teachers. (p. 9)

The research from Teitel also concludes that the professional development aspect of the PDS can also apply university faculty as well. This review of research on Professional Development Schools states that:

For university faculty, the opportunities to work more intensely and in context with pre-service and in-service teachers can provide substantial professional development, along with the chance to integrate their teaching and research, and to take leadership in developing the PDS. (p. 9)

Although it has been determined through self-reporting that the change in roles and structures have benefitted the pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and the university faculty, there is still a concern that "it has proven hard to measure the impact of PDSs on experienced educators in quantifiable ways" (Teitel, 2001, p. 9). Therefore, the following is an explanation of a shared supervision model for pre-service teachers and includes the results of informal data and observations from the first semester in which shared supervision was implemented. In this study we wanted to

determine the effectiveness of the Shared Supervision Model in an elementary Professional Development School and find out what areas needed improvement before continuing implementation of this supervision model.

Description of Program

Forest Dale Elementary School became a Professional Development School in 1997 through a partnership with Ball State University. The focus of the partnership was to prepare pre-service teachers using the goals of the Holmes Partnership. The Holmes Partnership, an association of teacher preparation universities, determined that the purpose of Professional Development Schools should be the following:

1. A focus on student achievement, and the involvement of children in meaningful instruction.
2. An organization of schools as communities of learning.
3. An understanding that *all* children can learn and that social barriers should not be in place in a school setting.
4. A focus on continued learning for teachers, teacher educators, and administrators.
5. Reflection and research through joint participation by teachers and researchers.
6. New structures and organizations of schools and universities to support the concept of Professional Development Schools. (Holmes Partnership, 1986).

After adopting the philosophy of the Holmes Group and identifying particular goals for the PDS partnership, Forest Dale Elementary decided that the preparation of student teachers was the primary concern of the PDS partnership. This quickly became a focus of the PDS as many student teachers chose this site for their student teaching placement. Student teachers at Forest Dale typically complete assignments of sixteen weeks of student teaching in one assigned grade level, and participate in seminars, professional development activities, and other opportunities during their experience. Although students are

only assigned to one teacher as their supervisor for student teaching, the staff is very welcoming and helpful to all pre-service teachers in the building. Frequent collaboration and co-planning exists among each grade level team at the school.

As the partnership of the PDS developed, the supervising teacher and the university supervisor began to take on new roles. The classroom teachers became more and more comfortable with providing daily feedback to student teachers and became responsible for completing student teacher summative evaluations which were completed four times during the student teaching experience. The classroom teachers also held "benchmark conferences" with the pre-service teachers to go over the evaluations, point out areas of strength, and make recommendations for improvement. Many of the teachers also completed a university course on the supervision of student teachers which was offered on site in the elementary school. As they teachers became more involved and comfortable in the process of evaluating student teachers, it was obvious that they were ready for a new role in the supervisory process.

At the same time that this knowledge level was increasing for the classroom supervisors, the university liaison was transforming her role in the supervisory process as well. While her primary role in the Professional Development School Partnership had once been the completion of teaching observations for the pre-service teachers, the school was working on a newly required professional development plan that required her assistance in the areas of research and planning staff development for the school faculty. Therefore, during the fall of 2002, shared supervision was implemented at the PDS site.

In order to implement the idea of shared supervision at Forest Dale, a meeting was held during the first week of the fall semester to discuss the opportunities for changes in the supervisory process with student teachers that were placed in the school. The seven teachers who were hosting student teachers that semester, the school principal, and the university liaison attended this meeting. The main focus of this meeting was to examine the procedures that were already in place

at the school and to determine whether a shift toward a shared supervision model was feasible. The liaison first explained that eight visits were required for each student teacher (based on the idea of visiting every other week for a sixteen week placement). These supervisory visits could include the initial visit with the classroom teacher in which procedures and paperwork for student teaching were explained, as well as the final visit in which the student teacher shared his/her portfolio with the classroom and university supervisors. Therefore the issue at hand was the decision about who would complete the six written observations during the semester. After much discussion, the following plan was implemented:

1. Each classroom supervisor would complete four of the six observations using the required university forms. These forms existed in triplicate format so that the classroom teacher, university supervisor, and pre-service teachers could all receive copies for their files.
2. The university supervisor would complete two of the observations of the pre-service teacher, one about midterm, and the other toward the end of student teaching (preferably when the student teacher was teaching his/her required teaching unit).
3. The university teacher would complete three observations of the student teacher when working with new classroom teachers. The teachers who had 0-1 student teachers in the past requested that the university supervisor complete the initial observation to provide appropriate modeling for newer supervisors.
4. All parties also agreed that if there was ever a difficult student teaching situation that the university supervisor would provide more feedback or participate more in the evaluations if necessary. This idea came from the classroom teachers who stated that they would appreciate more guidance from the university supervisor if this were to happen.

After determining the parameters of the shared supervision model, the plan was implemented with the pre-service teachers, and follow-

up meetings were held to determine the success of the program. While this pilot program was deemed to be successful, a few suggestions and concerns arose during the semester in which the shared supervision took place. Results of these discussions as well as feedback from the teachers follows.

Discussion

After implementing the shared supervision model for the first semester, the teachers, administrators, and university liaison met to determine whether this model had been effective and to decide if any changes should be made for the next semester. A survey was also administered by the

university faculty member to gather data about this new supervision model (see Table 1).

Overall, shared supervision was very successful at Forest Dale. The majority of teachers stated that they enjoyed sharing the supervision of student teachers with the university faculty member, that they felt this model allowed for more opportunities to provide feedback to their student teachers, and felt that the university liaison was better able to provide assistance to the school in other ways. They also felt that the student teacher was aware of how the supervisory process worked and that the PDS liaison was still able to help using this process.

Table 1
Survey Results from Classroom Teachers

Item #	Response
1. I enjoyed participating in the Shared Supervision of my student teacher this semester.	4.57
2. I felt more empowered and "in charge" of my student teacher by participating in Shared Supervision.	3.85
3. I feel that Shared Supervision allowed me more opportunities to provide feedback to my student teacher	4.00
4. I felt that the PDS liaison was still able to help using this model.	4.57
5. I would like more information about this model for my next student teacher.	2.71
6. I felt like my student teacher was aware of the Shared Supervision model and how it worked.	4.28
7. I would like to have a detailed calendar of dates and duties provided for future student teachers.	4.28
8. I feel like the Shared Supervision Model created much more work for me.	2.57
9. I feel that the liaison was able to provide assistance to the school in other ways through Shared Supervision.	4.57
10. I would like to continue using Shared Supervision at my school.	4.28

Number of Teachers = 7

Avg. Years of Experience = 11.8 *Range from 4-25 years total

Avg. # of Student Teachers Supervised = 4.71 *Range from 1-10 total

Each item was rated on a scale from 1-5, with 5 being the highest

Teachers participating in the shared supervision made comments such as:

- “I feel I have more control of my own classroom and more of a say in what my student teacher does. I feel like I have the authority to make decisions which impact my classroom, and help my student teacher without always having to discuss it with the university supervisor first.”
- “I think that shared supervision has made me think more about my own teaching and professional decisions. If I know that I am about to mark something on a student teacher’s evaluation form, I think about how well I have modeled this for her before making that decision.”
- “Shared supervision is basically like taking my Post-it note comments that I was already doing for my student teacher’s lessons and writing them on a more formal piece of paper. It isn’t MORE work, I am just doing my comments and supervision in a different way.”
- “As a university supervisor, changing to a shared supervision model has allowed me to spend more time working with the PDS site on school improvement plans, professional development activities, and other areas where I was needed in the school. I still get to know my student teachers, but I am not spending all of my PDS time completing observation forms anymore.”

During the discussions and surveys, a few suggestions to improve the shared supervision process were also revealed. The first suggestion was that the teachers wanted a calendar or checklist of the responsibilities and duties they were to perform during the semester. Since the classroom teachers were now providing additional observations, they stated that a calendar would help them remember when observations, conferences, and other tasks were due during the semester.

Another recommendation for the shared supervision process came from the student teachers. When the staff decided at the beginning of the

semester to collaborate on the supervision, they determined that the university supervisor would complete two observations around midterm and the last weeks of student teaching. However, after implementing this process, it was determined that the university supervisor needed to complete an earlier observation of the pre-service teachers. This had to do with the “comfort level” of the student teachers and the fact that they were uncomfortable waiting until the eighth week of student teaching to receive feedback from the university supervisor. Since the university supervisor was ultimately responsible for the final evaluation of the student teacher, the students preferred knowing the expectations of the supervisor earlier in the semester. Even though the university supervisor had weekly contact with the student teachers during seminars, meetings, and informal conversations, the student teachers had heard the “horror stories” of difficult university supervisors and said they wished they knew the expectations of observation before midterm in the semester! Therefore, the supervision model was revamped to include an earlier observation from the university supervisor, making the total number of observations by the classroom and university supervisors equal.

By changing these two policies in the shared supervision, all parties involved in the supervision felt that the evaluations would better benefit the student teachers in the future, by providing more immediate feedback and by keeping the teachers on track for scheduling observations and conferences for the pre-service teachers. These changes were implemented during the next semester, as they were relatively easy changes to make in the evaluation process.

Conclusions

The shared supervision of student teachers in the Professional Development School was determined to have positive effects on the classroom teachers involved in this program. One of the ways that this model had positive effects was through increased empowerment of the teachers involved. By allowing the teachers to complete

more of the supervisory work, the teachers said that they felt more responsible for the pre-service teachers placed in their classrooms. As Morris, Nunnery, Taylor, Knight, and Brooks (2000) state,

While the concepts of teacher empowerment and employee empowerment probably share the same denotation, empowerment of teacher appears to have connotations other than, or in addition to, a sense of control and increased responsibility...not only do empowered teachers have decision-making power in the classrooms, but they also have authority to significantly influence decisions related to education at the school or system level. (p. 94)

Another important aspect of the shared supervision model is that the university liaison was able to increase her role in the PDS by providing more services to the school in the areas of staff training, substitute teaching, and professional development. The liaison was better able to use her assigned time of one day per week to assist the school and children because her observation time was now shared by the supervising teachers. This has been documented in other university partnerships as well. Kleinsasser, Bird, and Warne (2000) found the following:

The traditional role of the university supervisor has been transformed into that of university liaison, opening up new avenues for the university to extend and experiment with the professional development school process. No longer adhering to traditional supervision strategies, the university liaison's first job is to develop and nurture the PDS concept. Rather than coming in only to observe student teachers, liaisons visit their PDS sites on a regular basis. They provide assistance with staff development, and may also serve as team teachers, or even as substitute teachers for an hour or so (p. 63).

Overall, the shared supervision of student teachers was successful in its first semester of implementation in our PDS site. While a few recommendations such as a detailed list of responsibilities and an earlier visitation by the university liaison were suggested, the empowerment of the classroom teachers and the emerging role of the liaison were successful components of the PDS partnership. Hopefully, with continued communication and support by all of the stakeholders in the Professional Development School partnership, the preparation of student teachers will continue to improve.

References

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