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COOPERATING TEACHERS AS SCHOOL BASED TEACHER EDUCATORS: STUDENT TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS.

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Abstract:

The National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore adapted and implemented a Partnership Model with schools in 1999 to help student teachers translate what they have learned in the teacher education programme into practice during the Practicum. This was realized through the utilization of classroom practitioners as cooperating teachers (CTs) to monitor and supervise student teacher's teaching. This study explored the expectations of the student teachers from their cooperating teachers and the type and level of help they received from their cooperating teachers during the practicum. The areas in which help is desired and considered important by student teachers fall under four broad categories: help in teaching the curriculum subjects, help in classroom management, information to function well in the school environment, and help in evaluating and providing feedback on their teaching. The level of help provided in these areas was below the level of student teachers' expectations. The article suggests how the role and status of the CTs may be improved to become effective partners in teacher education.

Cooperating teachers as school based teacher educators: Student teachers' expectations.

Introduction

The practicum is considered as one of the most useful components of the teacher education programme by student teachers and teacher educators (Lourdusamy, Soh, Moo, Lim & Sim, 2001; Ramsey, 2000;

Alexander & Galbraith, 1997; Tisher, 1990). Alexander and Galbraith (1997, p.18) state that "teaching realities gained from experience in the school are universally proclaimed as essential elements in teacher training". While Ramsey review speaks of "placing professional experience and related learning at the centre of teacher education" (Ramsey 2000, p.58). Tisher (1990, p. 76) reports that "student teachers believe that the practical experience of observing expert teachers, receiving feedback, and practicing strategies are the most important factors in their growth as teachers". The importance given to practicum in teacher education and the hands-on nature of practicum in a situated practice field requires teacher education institutions to make the practicum a meaningful experience. Because practicum is a period in which student teachers are attempting to put into practice the many theories and skills that they have been exposed to in the teacher education programme in the actual classroom situation and it could also be a period of anxiety and adjustment for student teachers. Student teachers need some mentoring at this point. Now there is a greater recognition of the contribution that practitioners in schools can make towards student teachers' education and development (Sandholtz & Finan, 1998). This has given rise to a variety of school-university partnership in teacher education (Brandy, 2000).

Cooperating Teachers

Zimper & Sherril, (1996, p.291) point out that "during the last few decades, the most common form of practitioner involvement in teacher education programmes has been through the utilization of cooperating teachers". They are most often experienced classroom practitioners assigned to take a student teacher under their wing for an extended period of time. The triadic relationship among the classroom teacher, student teacher and university supervisor has become the standard mode of operation in administering the practicum (Zimper & Howey, 1987). However standards used to select cooperating teachers according to Zimper and Howey (1992) have often been minimal and those selected receiving minimal recognition for their effort. Very little staff development has been put in place for cooperating teachers by the institutions involved (Goodman, 1988). In spite of some problems inherent in the cooperating teacher role Zimpher and Sherril (1996, p.291) emphasis that the "new conception of how one learns to teach' through linking the learning of student teachers with the experience of practicing teachers and teacher educators requires school-university collaboration in initial professional development of student teachers.

In a survey done in the United States (RATE IV, 1990) the profile of cooperating teachers in the United States showed that on the average cooperating teachers had 16 years teaching experience. They worked in the same school for 12 years or more and their average age is 43 years. Most of them hold a master's degree or advance diploma in education. More than 77% reported that they are more than adequately prepared in terms of knowledge of effective teaching, classroom observation skills, holding conference with student teachers, and providing feedback on performance. Survey responses also confirmed that they were committed to their role in teacher preparation, that they view their role and their student teacher experience as the most important part of the teacher education process. However, in the same survey only about one third of the cooperating teachers reported that they were involved in any kind of Professional Development programme relative to preparation for their role. Zimpher and Sherril (1996) reported that typically cooperating teachers received materials and handbooks on their roles in the student teaching enterprise and they participated in some initial meetings relative to their school based supervision.

McIntyre, Byrd and Foxx (1996) in reviewing the roles of cooperating teachers came to the conclusion that cooperating teachers can greatly influence the student teacher's teaching context and also their behaviour and beliefs in both positive and negative terms. We cannot therefore assume that all teachers have the qualities and temperament to help advance the development of student teachers professionally through mentor leadership. In fact research often depicts the influence of cooperating teacher on the student teacher in negative terms (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; Winitsky, Stoddart, & O'Keefe, 1992). From the literature two important aspects stand out regarding the cooperating teacher's role: the behaviours they exhibit or model; and the process and content of feedback they provide to the student teachers. The most effective teachers provide clear specific feedback to their student teachers, provide rationales for suggestions given and exhibit self reflection.

The Practicum

In general, there are three models of involving the schools in pre-service teacher education. According to Whiting, Whitty, Furlong, Miles & Barton (1996) the most common model is the 'integrative' model. In this model the student teacher's experience in the teacher education institution is integrated with the world of the school. The university supervisors play the more dominant role in the teaching, guiding, mentoring and the assessment of student teachers with minimal formal input from the school practitioners in the planning and provision of training. In a sense the schools allow the teacher education institutions to use their classrooms for student

teachers' teaching experience. If any role at all is giving to them it is only of an advisory nature and they are not involved in the assessment process.

The second model is the 'partnership model' (Bullough, Hobbs, Kauchak, Crow, Stokes, 1997). In this model the teacher education courses are planned and run on the basis of a partnership between the teacher education institute and the schools. Teitel (1998) indicates that in practice this is often difficult to attain due to differences in cultures and distinctiveness of teacher education institutions and schools. Generally to accommodate these differences, teacher education institutions resort to developing working partnerships with distinct roles for the schools.

The third model is the 'Community of Teachers model' (Stein, Silver, & Smith, 1998). In this model, the student teachers are immersed in the school system. They proceed through their coursework and school experience together. The underlying premise in this model is that prospective teachers need experience in collaborative learning communities in which they are afforded the freedom to experiment with alternative approaches and strategies with the support of their peers. A number of such experiments are currently underway in the United States to transform existing teacher education programmes' contexts into communities of learners that link the learning of student teachers with the learning of experienced teachers and teacher educators (Barab, Squire, & Dueber, 2000)

National Institute Of Education Partnership Model

Until January 1999 the National Institute of Education (NIE) at the Nanyang Technological University, the one and only teacher education institution in Singapore used the 'integrative' model in its relation with the schools as partners in teacher education. In this model the NIE supervisors played the major role in mentoring and supervising the student teachers. With the introduction of a number of initiatives in Singaporean schools by the Ministry of Education (MOE) it became necessary to promote a closer working relationship between NIE, MOE and the schools. This was deemed necessary to ensure that the initial teacher preparation was compatible with the changes in the rest of the system. In 1999 the NIE-School Partnership model was developed. The concept of partnership in this model, as explained by Wong & Goh (2002)

"rests upon the understanding of the complementary strength of NIE (the provider of theoretical knowledge) and the schools (the provider of practical knowledge) and how these can be fruitfully joined for the benefit of the trainee teachers." (p.200)

The role of NIE in this model was to provide student teachers with theoretical knowledge and principles underpinning practices. However, learning to teach and manage the classroom was to be learned under the guidance and tutelage of experienced teachers in the school.

With the implementation of this partnership model, the schools were encouraged to accept a greater responsibility for teacher preparation. Appointed cooperating teachers (CTs) now carried out most of the supervision and mentoring of student teachers during the practicum. As a consequence student teachers relied more on their cooperating teachers to guide them and help them develop teaching and managing skills. Each student teacher was assigned to two or more cooperating teachers to help him/her. These teachers were specialist teachers in the subjects the student teacher was learning to teach. The university supervisors now make only two lesson observations per student with written feedback and post-teaching conference mainly to act as "quality controllers" and help validate the grade suggested by the school. The final grade for each student teacher is jointly decided by the school and NIE based on the reports submitted by the cooperating teachers and the university supervisor.

The Study Of The New Partnership Paradigm

Given the finding of the study carried out by Wong and Goh (2002) a concern that surfaced about cooperating teachers was the level of competencies with which the CTs mentored and assessed the student teachers. Professional Development training to upgrade the mentoring skills was recommended. For a successful Professional Development programme it is important that CTs are aware of the areas in which student teachers expect help from them so that they can prepare themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills to mentor and guide the student teachers during the Practicum.

This study explored the concerns/expectations of student teachers and their perspective on the level of help received during practicum. Before they went out to the schools for the practicum, student teachers were asked to list areas in which they desired help from their cooperating teachers and the level of importance of help in those areas. At the end of the practicum a survey was carried out to find out the extent to which they received help in the desired areas.

Answers were sought to the following questions.
1. What are areas in which student teachers desired help?
2. Which of the desired areas are considered important by student teachers?
3. What is the level of help provide by the CTs in these areas?
4. Is there any discrepancy between the actual help provided by the CTs and those considered important by student teachers?

Methodology

Participants
This study was carried out with a group of student teachers from the 2002-2003 cohort of the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) secondary programme. The student teachers had completed the on-campus courses and were getting ready for their one and only practicum before graduation. These student teachers had varied academic background in terms of their areas of specialization or teaching subjects from the humanities, sciences, mathematics and technical subjects.

Development of Questionnaire

Through an open-ended questionnaire, a group of student teachers (N = 72) were asked to write down the areas in which that they would like to get help from CTs when they go out for their practicum in schools. Their responses were tabulated and analysed. The twenty most commonly cited areas of concerns were selected. These twenty items were used to develop the survey questionnaires. Table 1 displays the twenty most desired areas of help nominated by the student teachers in the open-ended survey. The areas in which help is desired by student teachers may be categorised into four broad areas of concern: help related to teaching the curriculum subjects, (items - 5, 9, 16, 17, 19 and 20), help related to classroom management (items – 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 12), help related to functioning well in the school environment (items – 2, 10 and 11) and help related to evaluation of their teaching and feedback (items – 13, 14, 15 and 18).

Data collection Procedure
The survey questionnaire was administered before and after the practicum to get the expected and actual help giving by the CTs. The pre-practicum questionnaire required the student teachers to indicate the importance of help in each of the twenty selected areas on a three-point

scale. Student teachers in five tutorial classes who were part of the new partnership concept were invited to complete the questionnaire during the last tutorial before they went out for the practicum. The post-practicum questionnaire was transmitted to the same student teachers electronically using the online Blackboard platform during the last week of the practicum. They were requested to indicate on a three-point scale the level of help provided by their CTs in each of the twenty selected areas. The CTs were not informed about this survey by the researcher or by the student teachers so as not to influence the CTs in any way.

In the final count 107 usable sets of data from 36 male students and 71 female students were collected. The data were
analysed using the SPSS: PC software. Descriptive statistics were used to identify the areas of help considered important by the student teachers and the perceived level of help provided by CTs in these areas. The t-test analysis was used to see whether there was gap between desired and actual help provided. The level of significance was set at 0.05.

Findings

Important areas of help

All the twenty (20) areas nominated by student teachers as areas where they would desire help were considered important by more than 50 percent of the sample in this study except item 15 which relates to guidance in balancing teaching and personal life (Table 1).

Table 1
Results of Data Analysis

No.	**Areas of desired help**	Results of data analysis				
		Desired help - important	Sufficient help – received	Desired help - important	Sufficient help received	Significance of diff. in Mean
		Number (Percent)	Number (Percent)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	T- value
1	Provide a profile of the classes I am going to teach	86 (80.4)+	49 (46.2)	1.77 (.56)	1.43 (.55)	4.76***
2	Introduce me to the general structure of the school system and culture.	84 (78.5)+	33 (34.0)	1.76 (.49)	1.18 (.69)	7.76***
3	Show me effective ways of managing different types of classrooms	88 (82.2)	23 (21.5)	1.80 (.44)	1.10 (.59)	10.22***
4	Show me how to determine the pace of the lesson for different ability classes	70 (65.4)	26 (24.3)	1.63 (.54)	1.03 (.70)	6.64***
5	Share teaching materials/resources that are related to the teaching of the subjects.	86 (80.4)+	36 (33.6)	1.80 (.40)	1.18 (.68)	8.14***

6	Teach me techniques to handle difficult students in the class.	90 (84.9)+	26 (24.3)	1.83 (.43)	1.06 (.67)	10.30***
7	Show me ways to make lessons interesting for different ability classes.	69 (64.5)	19 (17.4)	1.64 (.48)	.84 (.73)	10.02***
8	Show me how to build rapport with the students so as to gain their trust and cooperation.	71 (66.4)	24 (22.4)	1.59 (.63)	.92 (.76)	8.00***
9	Help in the planning of the lessons in the initial stage of teaching practice.	60 (56.4)	24 (22.4)	1.57 (.50)	.99 (.71)	6.41***
10	Let me know the rules and procedures to function effective in the school.	75 (70.1)	32 (29.9)	1.70 (.46)	1.14 (.70)	8.00***
11	Provide me information on the various types of resources available for teaching subjects.	78 (72.9)	36 (33.6)	1.71 (.50)	1.17 (.72)	6.78***
12	Show ways to gain students attention and motivate them to learn.	75 (70.1)	17 (15.9)	1.66 (.55)	1.00 (.58)	8.55***
13	Suggest ways to improve my teaching skills based on my performance in class.	95 (88.8)+	64 (59.8)	1.87 (.39)	1.55 (.53)	4.43***
14	Provide encouragement and support when lessons do not work out well.	70 (65.4)	50 (46.7)	1.60 (.60)	1.39 (.66)	2.19*
15	Discuss with me how I may balance my teaching life and personal life.	13 (28.0)	9 (8.4)	1.10 (.67)	.63 (.70)	4.83***
16	Give me independence to try out new innovative teaching approaches.	69 (71.0)	62 (57.9)	1.71 (.46)	1.53 (.62)	2.34*
17	Introduce me to teachers teaching the same subjects to get support and help.	75 (70.1)	19 (17.6)	1.67 (.53)	.88 (.72)	8.92***
18	Provide constructive criticism and fair evaluation of my teaching.	94 (87.9)+	61 (57.6)	1.88 (.33)	1.55 (.55)	5.54***
19	Provide guidance as to	91	42	1.83	1.30	7.19***

	how I can effectively teach the content of the subject.	(85.0)+	(39.3)	(.42)	(.65)	
20	Provide opportunity for me to observe experienced teachers teaching	88 (82.2)+	22 (20.6)	1.81 (.42)	.99 (.72)	9.01***
	Overall			33.91 (5.91)	21.49 (8.38)	13.76***

(N = 107), (+ = most important), (probability *p< .05, *** p< .001)

Eight areas considered important by more than 80% of student teachers related to the evaluation feedback on their teaching, teaching the subject content effectively and classroom management.

Suggest ways to improve my teaching skills based on my performance in class (88.8%)
Providing constructive criticism and fair evaluation (87.9%)
Provide guidance as to how I can effectively teach the content of the subject (85.0%)
Teach me techniques to handle difficult students in the class (84.9%)
Provide opportunity for me to observe experienced teachers teaching (82.2%)
Show me effective ways of managing different types of classrooms (82.2%).
Share teaching materials/resources that are related to the teaching of the subjects (80.4%)
Provide a profile of the classes I am going to teach (80.4%)

Another group of 6 areas considered important by more than 70% of the student teachers related to getting information to function effectively in the school system (item 2, 10,11, 17), and the need for space to innovate and experiment in teaching and guidance in motivating students (item 16, 12).

The rest (6 areas) were considered important by less than 70% of the student teachers. These areas referred to general techniques of teaching (item 4, 7, 14, 8, 9, 15).

Help rendered by cooperating teachers during Practicum

The findings show that only in three areas more than 50 percent of the student teachers perceived having received sufficient help, notably in:

Suggesting ways to improve my teaching based on my performance in class (59.8%)
Providing constructive criticism and fair evaluation of my teaching (57.6%)
Giving me independence to try out new innovative teaching approaches (57.9%)

For the rest of the identified areas between 10-50 % of student teachers reported that they received sufficient help with the exception of item 15. About 50 % of the student teachers received encouragement and support when lessons did not work out well (item 14), and received class profiles of classes they were teaching (item 1). About 40% of the student teachers received sufficient guidance in the teaching of their subject (item 19). Only about 30% of cooperating teachers shared or provided information about teaching materials and resources available with student teachers (item 5, 11) or introduced student teachers to the general structure of the school system and culture (item 2). Only about 20% of student teacher reported that cooperating teachers have provided sufficient help in classroom management strategies (item 6, 4, 8, 3), lesson planning (item 9), observation of other teachers teaching (item 20) providing information about school rules and procedures (item 10), how to teach different

ability students (item 7), motivate students (item 12), or introduce them to other teachers teaching the same subject (item 17).

Less than 10% of the cooperating teachers had talked to student teachers about how to cope with teaching demands and personal life (item 15) although 28% of the teachers have indicated that it is important to them.

Discrepancy between desired and actual help

To look at the overall discrepancy between the expected and actual help provided by CTs the item scores were added to form the *Expected Help* scale and *CT Help* scale. The reliabilities of these scales were determined by examining the Cronbach alpha coefficient of reliability. Both scales showed high internal consistency in response. The coefficient of reliability of the *Expected Help* scale was .864 and that for *CT Help* scale was .929.

Though help was provided by the CTs to the student teachers as seem from the findings in Table 1 there was a significant difference in the level of student teachers' expectation and help provided by the CTs.($t = 13.72$, df 105, $p < .0001$). Further analysis of individual items showed statistically significant difference between the expected and actual help provided by the CTs in all the 20 areas (see Table 1). From the perspective of student teachers the CTs were not providing the help to the level of their expectation in the areas identified by them.

Discussion of Findings

Desired areas of help

The areas in which help was considered most important by above 80% of the student teachers were related to the evaluation feedback on their teaching, teaching the subject content effectively and classroom management. These findings indicate the first concern of student teachers to be related to their final grade and matters related to it, like teaching their subject content effectively and managing the class well which are core areas in which student teachers are assessed. Though there is input related to these areas in Curriculum Studies and Educational Studies modules in the teacher education programme, these are in fact areas which are practical in nature and can be best experienced at the school setting. The practitioners are in the best position to be mentors and guides to provide help in these areas to student teachers in the real world context.

Next in importance were help in getting information to function effectively in the school, space to innovate and experiment with teaching and guidance in motivating students. CTs are the best source of information about the school and students for the student teacher to integrate into the school culture and function effectively in the school. The amount of space given to student teachers to experiment also depends on CTs belief about teaching. Some CTs require the student teachers to conform to their way of doing things and have a negative effect on their growth.

Lowest level of important was given to areas related to general techniques of teaching. Perhaps, this is so because these issues have been discussed in the on-campus courses. Techniques of motivation, catering for individual differences, pacing of lesson, time management and other issues related to teaching are discussed at length in the teacher education modules. However, they still need to see these skills modeled and practise them in the actual class context.

Cooperating teachers' help

From the perspective of student teachers many cooperating teachers seem to have not sufficiently adjusted to accommodate the added responsibilities of student teacher mentoring. Perhaps they are not clear about their roles in the partnership model in teacher education. Some of these problems may also rest with the lack of clear communication between the university and the schools. The typical communication process between the university and the schools tend to be one of division of labour in the teacher education process rather than being a collaborative process. The teacher education institution does its part and the schools do their share. Currently the National Institute of Education administers the practicum and briefs the school coordinating mentors (SCM) once a year. (SCM is a person in the school who is in charge of all CTs in the school.) In turn she briefs the CTs in the school on their expected role in this partnership model of teacher education. University supervisor also make a visit to the school to talk to the Principal and CTs. But there is limited communication between the CT and the University supervisor who mentor the student teacher.

The level of help provided by the CTs in the areas surveyed in this study seems to fall short of the expectations of the student teachers. Even in the evaluation and feedback on teaching, which is the core task of supervision less than 60% of the student teachers reported that they received sufficient help. Other areas such as providing help in teaching curriculum subjects, in acquiring classroom management and motivation skills and getting information about the school rules and procedures faired much less favourably from the perspective of the student teachers. The reasons for this may be many. Perhaps CTs are too busy with their own work commitments and they do not have much time for mentoring the student teachers. The fault could also be on the part of the student teachers who do not make use of the opportunities available to them to consult their CTs. Perhaps there is a lack of rapport between the CTs and student teachers and the student teachers are reluctant to approach their CTs for help. All these need to be looked into to make the partnership paradigm effective.

Recommendation

Teacher leadership in school-university collaboration is the corner-stone in reforms advocating partnership model of teacher preparation. Therefore, for the successful operation of the school-university partnership model, specific role definition for university and school based teacher educators (CTs) need to be specified. We also need teachers who are confident in their teaching and who are aware of new perspectives in the field of education to provide the vision and the know-how for preparing a new breed of teachers for the changing social and economic environment in Singapore. Therefore, the assumption that any teacher who is effective with students in the class has the capacity to be successful teacher educator cannot be taken as the sole criterion for selecting CTs. It is important to establish some selection criteria that reflect local definition of teacher expertise, evidence of commitment to mentoring and personal qualities that reveal self-confidence, interpersonal skills and empathy in relationship with others.

It is not only important to identify potential CTs; they need to be aware of student teachers' expectations. For them to play an effective role in the teacher education programme, it is also essential that they acquire the necessary knowledge and skills and a positive attitude towards their role as partners in teacher education. This suggests a need for a professional development unit in the practicum department in institutes of teacher education. The main mission of this unit could be to help school based teacher educators to construct their knowledge and understanding of teaching and develop skills to mentor and guide prospective teachers. The areas identified by student teachers as important in this study could form the focal issues for dialogue and discussion between CTs and academics. But it must be remembered that teachers resist top-

down approach to professional development. It is therefore important to create an environment that truly engages teachers and faculty to exchanging views in a collaborative context as equals.

Another reason for the lack of enthusiasm towards teacher education by CTs may be due to little or no recognition that has been offered by the university for the teachers assuming these roles. The RATE IV survey (1990) also showed that cooperating teachers perceived that they are consulted rarely by the higher education colleagues. Perhaps this lack of equitable treatment as true members of the teacher education team causes low morale among CTs. Therefore, the selection of an organizing title and role definition that reflects some direct form of university affiliation for school based teacher educators (CTs) as suggested by Zimpher and Sherrill (1996) will be of some help. Title and adjunct status such as "Career Development Associate" or "Professional Development Associate" or "Teacher Education Associate" or of the like could be considered. This would give some recognition and status to the cooperating teachers in the teacher education fraternity.

Perhaps with some adjustments to the workload of teachers who are called upon to act as mentors to student teachers, professional development in the area of mentoring and recognition of their role as student teacher mentors would encourage the cooperating teachers to spend more time in inducting student teachers into the life of school and the teaching profession.

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