11-1-1996

Learning to live with conformity: Student teachers' reactions to multiple conformity factors during teaching practice

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Student Teachers' Reactions
to Multiple Conformity Factors
During Teaching Practice

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BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH ISSUES

This paper reports one aspect of a larger research project on the teaching practice experiences of staff, student teachers and associate teachers. The project is located in the School of Education at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, and early phases have already been reported in occasional papers and conference papers (Calder, Faire and Schon, 1993; Faire, 1994; Harold, 1994; McGee, Oliver and Carstensen, 1994; Whyte, 1994).

In this paper the focus is upon the views of a sample of student teachers regarding conformity and compliance in their practicum. This specific issue, as well as other issues being looked at in the project, relate to the broader political issue of the place of preservice teacher education. Should it be located in schools, or universities, or a combination of both sites? How can the university-schools partnership be made more effective?

The term "teaching practice" or "section" as it is often referred to in New Zealand, represents the range of experiences undertaken by student teachers while working in classrooms and schools. It has been demonstrated in numerous research studies that teaching practice is a valued part of teacher preparation in the eyes of student teachers (MacKinnon, 1989). Renwick (1992) found that many student teachers in three New Zealand colleges of education referred to teaching practice as *the 'most* significant way in which their training had helped them to become effective classroom teachers' (p.60). However, most also related their teaching practice experiences to what they had learned in their college-based courses. Renwick also noted that for some student teachers their teaching practice was less than satisfactory through problems to do with the quality of associate teachers, linking theory and practice, and supervising lecturers. Ramsay and Battersby (1988) reported that student teachers in New Zealand colleges of education sometimes had difficulty in relating what was

taught in their college courses to everyday primary classroom practice. Calder (1989) found that while most student-teachers found teaching practice to be a satisfying and valuable experience, some did not find it so. Some even went so far as to hide problems from their peers in case they should be seen as failures in the eyes of peers.

These few studies do not reveal a great deal about teaching practice from the student teacher's point of view. Because of the scant research attention to this issue in this country, and the importance being placed upon teaching practice, there is an increasing need for more understanding about the meaning of practicum for the student teacher. For teacher educators such understanding should lead to a review of policies and practices related to teaching practice.

As Ryan (1980, p.116) has stated, "we know very little about the relationship of our training and what is really going on in the minds and emotions of our students."

Increased importance is being placed on the student teachers' perceptions of their teaching practice experience for a number of reasons. First, the impact of teaching practice upon overall professional preparation has been problematic; while frequently cited by student teachers as the best part of pre-service teacher education, actual teaching practices do not always bear this out. From his study, MacKinnon (1989) concluded that the student teachers defined the practicum as a situation where significant professional growth was not an "advisable course of action." Second, there is the long-standing suggestion that the practicum is primarily a socialisation into the culture of schools. For example, Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985) noted that while there is a lack of consensus in the literature with regard to the degree of influence of various socialising agents in the school setting, the tendency for student teachers to comply with the practices and expectations of the school affects their personal professional development. Third, there is considerable agreement that the major purpose of the practicum is to link theory with practice. However, there is much less agreement about the extent to which these purposes are being achieved (Turney et al, 1982). All of these reasons which are based on empirical support point to the need for further investigation into just exactly what is occurring when student teachers enter the school setting. Clearly, there are complex factors involved in teasing out student perspectives (Ellwein, Graue, and Comfort, 1990).

The research reported in this paper was carried out at the University of Waikato's School of Education in order to gain a better understanding of the Year Three student teachers' final pre-service practicum experience and its value in preparing them as prospective teachers. The investigation had the following four main objectives.

1. To develop an understanding of those aspects of the teaching practice experience which were meaningful for the student teacher.

2. To develop an understanding of how these meanings changed as the student teacher progressed through the practicum, and how the student teacher managed and modified these meanings while working with other significant people in the practicum context.

3. To develop an understanding of how the student teacher transferred these meanings into practice.

4. To provide the Programme Director with information for the future development of the teaching practice component of the Primary Programme, thus serving an evaluation purpose.

This paper focuses upon the issue of conformity and teaching practice.

The Research Context

During their pre-service teacher education, student teachers undertake several teaching practice blocks which add up to at least 20 weeks of practicum. The focus of this research was the eight-week practicum usually undertaken in a student s third year. Before the practicum, the author presented an overview of the research to a group of 42 third year student teachers who were taking part in a Realities of Teaching course. The students consented to taking part in the research and two of them were also approached and agreed to become key informants to provide more in-depth case study material over the eight week period. The students appeared genuinely interested and supportive of the study. This may be in part, due to the fact that the students felt a commitment to helping future students through what their data revealed. Also, they could choose to do an alternative assignment based on data they collected, as part of a Realities of Teaching course which had, as part of its content,

work on professional issues related to beginning teaching. The students agreed to respond to a questionnaire before and after teaching practice and keep a log-book to record their perceptions about teaching practice.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Theoretical Framework

As the key concept in this type of research was meaning, Blumer's (1969) social theory of symbolic interactionism was applied to address the interpretation of meaning. Symbolic interactionism emphasises the importance of the relationship between the individual and the larger social setting. The underlying assumptions of this social theory are:

    (a)   that people act on things according to the meaning these things have for them;

    (b)   that the meaning underlying these things derives from the interaction that people have with others; and

    (c)   that these meanings are managed and/or modified through an interpretive process.

Lauer and Handel (1983) noted that the interpretation of a situation refers to the way we take into account the various parts of a particular situation so that appropriate behaviour can be decided on. How we define these situations, however, is influenced by numerous factors including our particular goals, how we view ourselves in the setting, and how we apply our perspectives which have developed from previous interactions.

The Process of Data Gathering

The teaching practice block commenced during the last week of April 1992 for a period of eight weeks with a two week break over the May primary school vacation. This practicum was regarded as particularly crucial by the students as it was their final pre-service practicum experience. For the most part, the students were placed in the schools and class levels which they had requested.

Data were gathered from the full group of 42 students prior to, during, and after the eight week teaching practice block. The group was made up of two tutorial groups from a compulsory course for all third year students (N=190), and was, as far as can be judged, representative of the whole intake. The first source was responses to a questionnaire administered prior to the teaching practice block commencing which focussed on students' anticipated feelings about their up-and-coming practicum. The questionnaire format included both closed and open-ended items. A further questionnaire was administered at the conclusion of the teaching practice block and paralleled questions asked in the initial questionnaire.

The students were also asked to keep a weekly log during the practicum. They were requested to record their ongoing reactions over the eight weeks. The log was formatted with guiding sub-headings. These sub-headings were set out as follows: the school; the amount and type of work; expectations placed on you; the children; your teaching; the associate teacher; contacts with School of Education staff; and other. They were selected because a review of the literature from several countries had identified them as important aspects of teaching practice (Ryan, 1980; Turney et al, 1982; Tardif, 1985; Zeichner and Tabachnick, 1985; MacKinnon, 1989; Bolin, 1990; Ellwein, et al, 1990).

The Process of Data Analysis

In general, the data analysis process was an ongoing continuous activity which guided the evaluation by moving from the broad descriptive concepts and themes to more focussed and selective ones. For the two key informants a running record was kept on the various forms of data gathering. The record included the initial questionnaire, the numerous taped conversations, the students' logs, their essays, and the final questionnaire.

The 'grounded theory' approach provided by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was used in the log-book data analysis. This allowed for the log-book data to be analysed inductively so a P!cture emerged as the data were collected and examined. Initial issues or propositions which were mainly based on first hand impressions were investigated further through subsequent interviews and document analysis in order to seek validation.

Over thirty categories related to teaching practice experience emerged. These were condensed into five thematic issues:

> living with compliance and conformity;
>
> development of professional relationships;
>
> the expectations placed upon student teachers;
>
> the significance of the associate teacher and visiting lecturer; and
>
> the importance of being a reflective practitioner.

LIVING WITH CONFORMITY AND COMPLIANCE

Introduction

The issue of conformity and practicum does not appear to have received a lot of research attention. However, there is a lot of indirect evidence (some cited earlier) that student teachers deliberately make compromises to conform so that they achieve ends such as satisfactory reports for the credentials they need to become a teacher.

Conformity in the teaching practicum relates to the broader field of occupational conformity. In any profession it is necessary that there be a certain amount of conformity. For example, in teaching, conformity helps ensure competent practice based upon generally accepted models of practice, and ensures socialisation into the accepted practices of a teacher. On the negative side, conformity can limit professional autonomy and initiative. Zeichner (1990) has drawn attention to the potential conflict for student teachers when faced with different approaches to professional practice, for example, a technicist approach compared with a reflective approach. The former is based upon conforming to clearly identified teaching skills; the latter upon more individualistic teaching styles developed in response to changing circumstances.

Comparative data

The 42 students who completed before and after questionnaires gave their views on their overall feelings about their eight-week teaching practice block and stress levels. Four-fifths of them viewed their experience 'very positively' or 'positively' which was an increase on their prediction of what it would be like. None rated the experience as predominantly

negative. One-fifth who had mixed feelings and cited these reasons: pressure because it was the final chance to impress, the 'lucky dip' nature of the placement, and the pressure from the workload and demands. Before the practicum, three quarters of the students expected that the practicum would carry a stress level that would be 'very high' or 'high'. However, this reduced to just under half of them following the practicum. Most of the remainder (37 percent) thought their stress level was 'in balance'.

Compliance and conformity

The question of status was uppermost in the minds of the student teachers in the first few days of their practicum. This was demonstrated by information gathered from the two key informants. From the first day Wayne and Jessie were unclear about their status as student teachers. They saw themselves as outsiders entering the classroom where they were dependent on their associate teachers, and where the children could play on the fact that they were unfamiliar with the class procedures. Coping mechanisms were quickly adopted in order to become familiar with the "ways of the class". To fit in with the existing classroom norms Jessie adopted the following strategy:

I first observed my associate teacher's methods and began using them as I thought this would help me to fit in faster and be seen as a teacher with respect, that is, above that of a student teacher.

During the first week of his practicum Wayne found the structure and nature of the classroom atmosphere "rigid and oppressive." It was totally foreign to his own teaching philosophies. He found it particularly difficult coming to terms with and agreeing with his associate teacher's teaching style as he did not want to undermine his associate teacher's authority. Wayne coped by using the following strategy:

I thought about the differences I would make to the educational process while still conforming to the procedures in place. I was satisfying my associate and partially satisfying my own conscience. In some ways this may be seen as a cop-out, but when you remember that the more you please your associate the better your report will be, then I think it's an understandable coping strategy.

For Jessie, the experience was quite different. She arrived at class to be greeted warmly by the associate teacher. Two minutes later the associate teacher was called away to the phone and was absent from the classroom for half an hour. As it was her first day Jessie was somewhat taken aback at being left alone with the children, but she set to and read to the children until her associate teacher returned. This occurrence was typical of Jessie s relationship with her associate. She described it as 'warm and friendly'. Compared to Wayne, she was given far more responsibility and free rein while at the same time having the full support of her associate teacher.

She [associate teacher] was there as a role model but she allowed me to experiment and even make mistakes. She stood back and then after a lesson we'd talk and she would offer positive suggestions and approaches.

Like Wayne, Jessie was not in full agreement with all of the methods used by her associate teacher. For example, she initially thought her associate teacher wasted time between activities, but these differences in methodologies and philosophies in no way interfered with their working relationship.

Finding a balance between being a student and a teacher at the same time was initially difficult but also very important for the student teachers. They were expected to be a teacher to the children, and a student to the associate teacher and visiting lecturer. The role of student tended to dominate, and compliance tended to be a taken-for-granted as part of being a student teacher in someone else's classroom. It was an unavoidable and advisable course of action because all of the students were aware of the importance of having a good section.

Many of the other student teachers made comments which agreed with this finding. Of her situation, one student said: Because I wasn't familiar with the rules and structure I just went along as best I could which in some cases this wasn't good enough because some children really tried me. Building up to full control, they still looked upon me (and actually said to me) as only being a student teacher not a real one. It made me feel very uncomfortable.

For the student teachers, compliance was not a matter of discarding their beliefs and teaching styles, but it was a mechanism used to have a successful practicum. For many, achieving a

commendable report at the end of the practicum was the favoured option, and this meant complying with the ways of the associate teacher.

On the importance of receiving a good final report the following experience of one student exemplifies how many of the other student teachers felt. She felt she was locked into a situation where, if she was to emerge as competent and successful she would need to comply. She was skeptical about how she was going to be assessed and by whose criteria - "you know keeping the kids quiet and on task." To "give them [associate teacher and visiting lecturer] what they wanted" she felt she became the "mimicking clone" of her associate teacher by following her teaching strategies from planning to her management of the class. She was not prepared to try new techniques for fear of losing the respect and trust of the children.

I was more concerned with gaining a positive response from them [the children] so the associate teacher and university lecturer would see me as a 'good' teacher. The student had guilt feelings about this but, in the end, her justification of "I did receive an excellent final evaluation" far outweighed any doubts she may have initially held.

Teaching Style

The above example shows how there was a very difficult issue for the student teacher to solve: Should the student teacher go along with the classroom situation in order to get a good final report or should experimentation be engaged in to develop a personal teaching style? Log-book entries show that nearly half of the student teachers chose to conform and put their own ideas on hold. Some rationalisations were:

> Given up hope of setting my own programme. Do that in my first year of teaching. (Fifth week)

> I wouldn't mind using some of my own ideas and techniques, but if I do I feel that the children would not make the most of the opportunity ... (Second week)

However, one student who was faced with major differences between his teaching style and that of his associate teacher, made the following comment in his log-book at the end of the section:

It was good to work with a male associate and see the different teaching style and greater control he seemed to have over tough individuals.

Conformity clearly reduced the enjoyment of teaching practice for some student teachers. One said:

This seems really bad but I seem to be enjoying my teaching less and less. I am hoping this is because of the expectations of my associate to teach me to be more and more like her. I really am beginning to feel very uncomfortable, almost robotic in my teaching and interaction. (Fourth week)

And in the following week added:

I have decided that my lack of enjoyment in teaching on section definitely has a lot to do with fitting into another teacher's routines and practices and then accepting or not accepting this teacher's style... (Fifth week)

The frustrations resulting from the need to conform created a sense of failure for one student and undermined her self confidence, which was only later restored by the visiting lecturer's comment. Her log-book entry shows the conflict she had been going through:

[Contacts with School of Education Staff] Excellent, I was visited this week. The lecturer was really positive and was able to talk through some of the problems that had arisen. She made me feel a lot more confident and not the failure I had been feeling. (Seventh week)

Another student who felt the pressure to comply with her associate's expectations, remarked that she felt as though she was:

...just doing the A T's dirty work. I feel more like a teacher aide just now. (Second week)

Conforming to the associate's style became a coping strategy.

> There are some things about teaching I have hardly any ideas about - eg. marking. I just copy my A T's style. I think it may be different if I had my own class and could set objectives and expectations... (Sixth week)

Conforming to the associates' management styles became pragmatic rather than automatic for some of the students. One student commented:

> I feel like I'm shouting but 'M' says I'm too quiet...

Another wrote:

> Feel like I yell too much, but it's what my associate does to get attention, and so it works with these children.

Children's reluctance to accept changes in routine meant that for those student teachers it was easier to conform to the classroom conventions than introduce changes.

Students expressed their concerns about the difficulties they were having fitting in their teaching practice requirements in the face of the pressure to conform to school schedules and classroom conventions. Not all the students enjoyed the opportunity of visiting other classes and collecting resources in the final week of section. In most cases this was because the principal or associate had asked the student to relieve for an absent teacher or the student had been asked to do extra work. The pressure of wanting to have a favourable report was the motivating factor in the students' complying with these expectations.

> Asked to do the marking and reports. I was in a quandary over this. I wanted to give it a go (challenged!) but knew it would take up much time. As I was still awaiting my Final Report I decided I had better stay on the right side of my associate and do them. In my heart I didn't want to, for I needed a rest. (Eighth week)

Although negative aspects have been presented so far, over half of the student teachers' log-books showed they reacted positively to conforming to classroom conventions. Of this group, conformity was either a non-issue, or a natural process for seven students who experienced good rapport with their associates and whose teaching styles were compatible with their associates. There were students whose teaching style differed from that of their associate, yet who enjoyed good rapport and found the opportunity and freedom to experiment with different styles.

> ...I'm enjoying this section as I'm working out if a certain method works, and trialling a lot of things.

The following log-book entries show how one student was given freedom to experiment:

> We get on well. She [The Associate Teacher] does things different to me but she is good in that she gives me a chance to express my new ideas... (Second week)

> My associate has very structured type teaching. I would not teach like her but at the same time I respect her ways as she does get her results. (Third week)

> My associate and I get on well. We are not intimidated by each other and get on well on a professional and personal basis... (Seventh week)

Some students made comments that showed they benefited by conforming to their associates' classroom management and control methods, for example:

> I am still working on my management techniques, I am following my associate's techniques and these are working well so far.

In some cases the student teachers did make overt changes to the existing routine in their classrooms. However, these instances were few and were usually the result of work required as part of their University courses. For example, one student said:

> There was one instance where I was totally resistant. I insisted that I teach an interactive science unit, because I knew it was a requirement of my course.

In summary, there was a prevailing viewpoint among the student teachers that the practicum situation was not generally conducive to experimenting, or making significant changes. The practicum was not seen as the ideal situation for trying out the ideas and skills which had been learned in the University environment. This does not necessarily imply that the student teachers viewed compliance as completely negative. The benefits in having a role model were also realised. However, they did feel that complying with the existing system in the classroom was appropriate and advisable, because of the ambiguous nature of their status, and their desire to receive a good final evaluation. What seemed clear was that good rapport between associate teacher and student teacher opened the way for experimenting and made conformity a more acceptable situation for the student teacher.

Conformity to School of Education Requirements

In this third year teaching practice, there were many tasks set by the School of Education. Conforming to classroom conventions and School of Education requirements proved to be somewhat of a delicate balancing act for the majority of the students. The pressure to succeed (albeit often self-imposed) created the need to conform to both the classroom conventions and associate expectations as well as to the School of Education requirements. For many students, the two conflicted, and this caused difficulties and extra stress. Students who enjoyed a good working relationship with their associates generally experienced fewer conflicting pressures to conform.

Conforming to the School of Education requirements posed difficulties for several students which is reflected in their log books. The actual volume of work that was required was the major cause for concern. One student wrote that the need to conform to School of Education expectations and meet her teaching practice requirements meant she was "not getting a chance to do anything that I would like to..."

A second concern came from a few students who felt caught between the need to conform to their associates' units and programmes and the need to meet the School of Education tasks:

Music and P.E. are getting done but not to the criteria in the Little Red Book [Teaching Practice Handbook]. It's really hard meeting needs of associate and School of Education. (Fifth week)

Really just teaching what needs to be taught - trying not to get stressed over teaching practice requirements. Been fitness testing the kids [a set task] but associate not too keen. (Seventh week)

A few students were unable to complete all their own tasks because much of their planning and teaching had been class-oriented rather than assignment-based as shown in one log-book entry. As we get more into teaching for the school's requirements it gets harder and harder to fit in the silly School of Education assignments. They are becoming an irritation and mechanical rather than helpful and relevant. It is taking me away from the focus on unit planning and full control. (Second week) Several student teachers found themselves caught in the middle of a 'no win' situation after having planned or partly-planned units, only to have to abandon them because of associate intervention or takeover, or because of unscheduled changes in the school or class timetable.

...l had finished planning my language programme only to be told I couldn't use it as my associate wanted the children for language. I have found it really frustrating when I have done the work and it hasn't even been acknowledged. (Seventh week)

One student, referring to the conflicting expectations of her associate and visiting lecturer, wrote philosophically: "Can't please all of them I suppose." Three other students reported that they were unable to complete some of their tasks according to School of Education requirements because their schools simply did not have the necessary resources.

At the opposite end of the scale there were a few students who focused on getting their tasks completed in order to conform with School of Education expectations, and then felt that they had missed out on prime teaching and developmental opportunities because of their preoccupation with assignments.

> ...There was too much School of Education work; sometimes I was too concerned with getting that finished and lost sight of the teaching and childrens' needs. (Eighth week)

Planning was a particular concern for a number of the student teachers. Those whose visiting lecturers expected full lesson plans and evaluations for every lesson taught through. oolt section had difficulty complying with these expectations. This was especially so where the associate disagreed with the need for such thorough records or the associate expected a different planning format to the one required by the School of Education. This pressure to conform to visiting lecturer expectations in the face of conflicting associate expectations created enormous stress for some students, and is reflected in the following log-book entry:

> My visiting lecturer wants me to go through and write extensive individual lesson plans for each subject to last to the end of section. For Art, Music, Physical Education and Science this is possible but not for the others. Both A. and I agree that this expectation is inappropriate and impractical as it means too much planning, while on full control or in your own classroom. (Fourth week)

At the same time, students recognised the importance of conforming to School of Education requirements and in general endeavoured to undertake all that was expected of them. The expectation that students would take on extra responsibilities outside of the classroom seems to have been particularly burdensome to students whose time was already taken up with classroom preparation, lesson planning, marking, evaluating and recording. For one student it was frustrating to find that the visiting lecturer paid little attention to detailed planning, yet was interested in extra-curricular involvement:

> [Lecturer] came to visit. - Great report, he didn't want to look at any of my planning - evaluations. Really interested in any responsibilities I've taken on. Don't understand why. (Third week)

> Since [lecturer] seems to place a great emphasis on extra responsibilities I am helping out my associate with mini-basketball. (Fourthweek)

Another student reported the following frustration at an apparent lack of understanding by a visiting lecturer of her large work input:

> Lecturer visit was fantastic - lesson was great, I was pleased, she was encouraging. "So what extra things have you been doing during Teaching Practice?" Are we envisaged as sitting around every lunch hour twiddling our thumbs? I had nothing to tell her, but I only had three or four lunch hours to myself all section! Duties are time consuming, as is marking and tracking school resources eg. videos, sports equipment... (Seventh week)

Conformity to the School of Education requirements posed difficulties for some students, but was regarded similarly as conformity to classroom conventions, that is, it was expedient to conform to the expectations and requirements as well as to classroom norms in order to be seen as having had a successful teaching practice experience .

Expectations

The previous section referred to the expectations placed on student teachers in their roles as both student and teacher. The pressure to 'perform' to the expectations of the University, the associate teacher, the children, the school, the parents, and themselves was constantly present. Conforming to these various demands and pressures created problems.

However, these expectations were accepted in most cases and seen as opportunities to grow. For example, Jessie organised a trip for the whole school to stay overnight on the local marae (Maori meeting house) while she had full control of the class and was busily planning units and completing her University set tasks. This really was a remarkable feat and was thoroughly enjoyed by the school and the community. Jessie talked about the trip as a very rewarding exercise for the children, for school-community relations, and for her own confidence: I organised a friend to come and speak for us, and the whole school went onto the marae. Our speaker is a Pakeha and they didn't realise that he could speak Maori. When he got up and spoke he blew them away literally. All night and the next day they kept on going on about how wonderful the speaker was because he quoted proverbs... It was a great start and the children sang a song and the kaumatua stood up and said it was the sweetest song he'd heard. The junior school went home after afternoon tea and we organised activities for the

seniors until dinner. After dinner the kaumatua spoke to us about the marae and I spoke in Maori for us. It was a bit nerve-racking but we all thoroughly enjoyed it... It was so valuable for everyone, and this week we have been making models of the marae...

Jessie went on to organise a hangi (traditional Maori meal) the following week and the school invited the local bilingual school to help and share with the hangi. She attributed being able to cope with the workload to good organisational skills. She began planning her lessons in the form of unit plans rather than individual plans.

> I do a unit plan at the beginning and I have all my objectives and activities set out, and then I plan only two or three days ahead. For my first unit on geometry I planned every day for about two weeks but I found as I went through, some of the activities were carrying over and some of them became irrelevant. Planning only two or three days ahead was far more useful and far less stressful.

Jessie's change in organising her lessons as the practicum progressed was typical of the way the other student teachers coped with the expectations placed on them. The student teachers willingly gave their time to become involved in the schools' extra-curricular activities but at the same time it was necessary for them to make changes in other areas in order to fit in all their requirements.

DISCUSSION

Part of the wider research being carried out on teaching practice within the School of Education was concerned with ascertaining the perceptions of third year student teachers about the meaning and value of their final teaching practice block. From the information on conformity and compliance several conclusions can be drawn.

1.   While the student teachers felt progressively more positive about the teaching practice block, after it was completed two concerns were raised. First, the need to develop a good relationship with the associate teacher was of paramount concern which in turn

related to a concern about the importance of the final practicum being successful. While over half the student teachers seemed entirely satisfied with the relationship they developed with their associates, the remainder raised issues of a negative nature. Second, concern was voiced about the demand being placed on the student teachers in terms of the expected workload, which was regarded as very demanding. Adapting to demands of part-time work and school activities in addition to classroom tasks was difficult for many student teachers. These concerns were related to having to fit in to a situation over which they had little power or control; they had to comply.

2. Comparatively, the level of stress experienced by the student teachers was less than they had anticipated. Stress was due, in the main, to on-campus requirements, expectations of the school and the associate teacher, and planning and evaluating lessons. Sometimes, it was made worse by outside demands such as part-time work, and in other cases, ill health. All of this is related to the need to conform to multiple demands.

3. Initially, it was important for the student teachers to clarify, in their own minds their status in the school. For the most part, student teachers were made to feel at home in schools, but there were some practices that produced feelings of inferiority and powerlessness. Compliance with existing classroom practices tended to be a taken-for-granted part of being in some else s classroom. Most student teachers quickly adopted coping strategies like observing their associate teacher in order to familiarise themselves with the classroom norms. Compliance was not seen only in negative terms as something which meant discarding beliefs and preferred teaching styles. Indeed, it was a mechanism to have a successful practicum, especially where experimentation was also possible.

4. At the same time, for many student teachers the importance of receiving a good final report meant complying with the ways of the associate teacher, even when there were problems in doing so, and even when it meant subjugating their own preferred teaching style. In this situation they were restricting their own personal development. By focussing on the needs and expectations of others they were unable to focus on their own growth needs. MacKinnon (1989) found a similar situation with Canadian student teachers. If a major purpose of the practicum is to transfer theory into practice,

the system of evaluation needs to be reviewed to reduce the 'give them what they want' habit.

5.   The research strategy of keeping weekly log books was seen by a number of student teachers as a contribution to their developing professional self-awareness and reflection. One commented: 'I found it was a structured way to evaluate my feelings and attitudes towards the school and my participation and how I could change for the best'.

Based on the interpretations of the data, teacher education institutions might learn from the findings in any evaluation of their own practicum provisions. The results suggest the need to review procedures and policies to achieve the following goals:

1.   To provide an environment where student teachers are encouraged to move beyond replicating the practices already in place in the classroom. This may be achieved through continuing and developing the idea of maintaining a log during the practicum, and providing the opportunity for the student teachers to meet for regular seminars over the eight week practicum to assess and explore their experiences with their peers.

2.   To give greater weight to associate teachers providing more formative evaluation notes to student teachers in addition to providing a summative evaluation report. Giving ongoing, regular feedback as a continuous process during the practicum would provide the student teachers with information about their progress so that they may further develop their teaching strategies and skills in the classroom.

3.   To clearly establish for all participants the specific objectives and the responsibilities of each group for the final practicum. This may be achieved by groups of the associate teachers, visiting lecturers and student teachers meeting prior to the practicum to convey objectives, clarify criteria and procedures, reconcile different emphases, and foster co-operation.

4.   To clearly establish and adhere to criteria for selecting associate teachers taking into account the fact that every skilled classroom teacher will not necessarily make a sound associate. Different skills are needed for classroom teaching compared to those

needed foc assisting in the professional development of student teachers. Suggestions for criteria that should be used in the selection of associate teachers could include teachers who are skilled in a variety of classroom techniques, have a positive interest and enthusiasm for working in the practicum, have had a number of years as practising teachers, and are are willing and able to work co-operatively with a University lecturer.

5.   To offer training by the School of Education to all associate teachers. Indeed, training should probably be a requirement to ensure that the above goals can be realised.

6.   To require University supervisors to review their supervisory practices to achieve greater consistency in expectations, and to improve skills of providing feedback and reporting on student teacher progress.

7.   To review policy matters to do with the roles and functions of student teachers during teaching practice, including their rights and obligations; and the obligations and rights of a school.

8.   To help student teachers establish realistic expectations during teaching practice, with a view to achieving a manageable workload that allows student teachers to practice without undue stress and overwork. Furthermore, they need help to be realistic about socialisation factors that operate in schools and the School of Education which place limits upon the degree to which student teachers can 'do their own thing'. While there should be some scope for experimentation and innovation and trying different approaches, there are necessary limits. The issue of conformity versus freedom needs to be addressed in a realistic manner.

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