Empowering Pre-service Teacher Supervisors' Perspectives: A Relational-Cultural Approach towards Mentoring

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Abstract: Positive relationship building between the university and the schools that receive their pre-service teachers are crucial to developing quality educators fit for the teaching profession. This paper presents an overview of a mentor workshop that was introduced by the professional experience unit of a regional university in Australia. The aim of the mentor workshop was to explore classroom teachers' concerns when supervising pre-service teachers and find ways to better support them in the supervisor role. In addition, different ways and ideas about how to best meet the high (and growing) demand for professional experience placements were explored. Findings suggest that closer relations between university and the schools were warranted to ensure the desired quality of supervision envisaged by all stakeholders. Findings also indicate a strong interest from some classroom teachers in further postgraduate studies in education. This has positive implications for university postgraduate education programs and corollary potential to increase postgraduate intake.

Introduction

The importance of relationship building, ostensibly the development of partnerships between schools and university professional experience units, is highlighted in reports such as the 'Top of the Class Report' by the Australian Parliament (2007), and in 'Effective and Sustainable University and School partnerships' by Kruger, Davis, Eckersley, Newell and Cherednichenko (2009). A positive relationship between the school and the university provides opportunities for research to advance education and also ensures that supervising teachers and their pre-service charges share a genuine interest in the educational outcomes and well-being of their students. The development of supportive partnerships between University and School is also highly beneficial to the teaching profession. Central to the effective functioning of this partnership is the provision of (1) quality professional experience placements for pre-service teachers with (2) suitably qualified and experienced supervising classroom teachers.

There is a concern Australia wide about the availability of professional experience placements (Jolley, Maplestone, & Kenton, 2010) and it is becoming increasingly stressful "for both the pre-service teacher who has not been placed (especially fee paying students) as well as for the professional experience staff responsible for the placement" (Jolley, 2011, p.1). The reason for the reluctance of some classroom teachers to accept the task of supervising pre-service teachers is partly due to the time it takes to provide quality supervision (Jolley et al. 2010). More importantly, it is also because some classroom teachers' feel that they lack skills in how to supervise pre-service teachers (Keogh., Dole., & Hudson, 2006; Rorrison, 2008; Author, 2011).

The disconnect that exists between the university teacher education program and the practicum experience needs to be carefully considered as it can lead to the loss of learning for

both the pre-service teacher and the supervising teacher and, if not acted on, can further erode the already fragile partnership between the university and school (Kruger et al., 2009). The role that the supervising teacher plays in supporting pre-service teachers during professional experience is crucial to the development of the pre-service teacher's professional teacher identity (Author, 2010). Unfortunately, it is not uncommon to find an absence of specific training or support with regard to how to supervise pre-service teachers. Other reasons why some teachers do not want to supervise pre-service teachers relates to the classroom teacher's lack of knowledge about how the university prepares its pre-service teachers for the professional experience placement and about the support available to them when the pre-service teacher is found at risk. It is for this reason that the mentor workshops for classroom teachers were developed. While the workshop design described in this article is not an entirely new concept, it is strongly differentiated from other programs in its clear and deliberate encouragement of teachers to take up postgraduate study. Jensen (2010) notes that only 16 per cent of Australian teachers in 2010 held higher degrees (Masters or Doctoral). These dismally low numbers are directly related to the lack of incentives for teachers to take on further study while they are teaching (Lovat, 2005). In addition there appears to be a lack of agreement among stakeholders and policy makers about the necessity of investing in a highly-educated workforce committed to life-long learning and the obvious flow-on benefits for students.

The overarching research question for this study was to explore *how do classroom supervising teachers experience their roles as supervisors to preservice teachers?* Literature examining the complexity of the mentoring relationship is first discussed, after which a relational-cultural framework is introduced. A description of the workshops and the associated study is followed by the findings and discussion.

The Complexity of Mentoring Relationships

It has been recognized that mentoring is a complex role that requires the supervising teacher to model good teaching practice, stimulate reflection, be encouraging, provide counselling and provide constructive daily feedback to the pre-service teacher (Crasborn, Hennisson, Brouwer, Korthagen, & Bergen 2008; Geen, 2002). LeCornu and Ewing (2008) suggest that current approaches to professional experience are not just about practicing teaching but also about learning about teaching so that both the supervising teacher and the pre-service teacher gain through the relationship. Rodgers and Raider Roth (2006) argue that the establishment of quality relationships are crucial to academic achievement, motivation and engagement. They explain that "the quality of the relationship is not a frill or 'feel good' aspect of learning, it is an essential feature of learning"... and that ..."what allows this relationship to flourish is complex and calls upon the mental, physical, emotional and relational resources of the teacher" (Rodgers & Raider Roth 2006, p. 267). From this perspective, "teaching demands connecting with students and their learning, and the health of that connection is nurtured or jeopardized by the teacher's relationship to herself" (Rodgers & Raider Roth, 2006, p. 272), which in turn has been and is influenced by the cultural context of the school. A 'relational-cultural' theory based on the seminal work of Miller (1976) provides a particular relevant and useful framework where the development of a committed and positive teacher identity can be seen as dependent on growth-nurturing relations of mutual empowerment and empathy (Comstock, Hammer, Strentzsch, Cannon, Parsons & Salazar 2008). This positive relationship is not only with the self but also with those from within the teaching profession, including teacher educators, school supervising teachers, mentors and other significant persons. Understood in this context, the professional experience provides an enabling setting for learning. This makes it possible for supervising teachers to perceive themselves as members of a learning community with the responsibility of

supporting and providing legitimate entry into the community for new members (Author, 2010).

Relational-Cultural Theory

A relational-cultural perspective is based on the premise that identity develops through and toward relationships which occur within and are influenced by a cultural context (Comstock et al., 2008; Miller, 1976). It affirms voice and narratives as central elements of a relational process and is based on the notion that growth and development of self occur not in isolation but in relations with others. In this sense the concept of relationships moves away from instrumental activities that support notions of an isolated individual self. Instead, it moves toward an interactional process in which "human beings are seen as experiencing a primary need for connection and essential emotional joining" and "a larger paradigm shift from the primacy of separate self to relational being must be considered to further our understanding of all human experiences" (Jordan, 1997, pp. 20-21). Underlying the relational-cultural model are the already mentioned concepts of growth-fostering relationships, mutual empathy, connections and disconnections. Growth-fostering relationships are characterized by mutual empathy, authenticity and empowerment (Comstock et al., 2008; Jordan, 1997; Miller & Stiver, 1997). Mutual empathy is perceived as mutual involvement and commitment to the relationship, authenticity is being genuine in the context of the relationship, and empowerment is the experience of being personally strengthened, encouraged and inspired to take action (Liang et al., 2007). Connection refers to the experience of relationships that are characterized by mutual empathy and mutual empowerment. Disconnection is the experience of ruptured relationship(s). Comstock et al., (2008) argue that personal growth occurs both in connection and in disconnections. Where there is an experience of ruptured relationship a re-connection can sometimes lead to a strengthened relationship and sense of confidence or alternatively to a diminished sense of self (Comstock et al, 2008; Liang et al., 2007; Miller, 1976). For example, it is not uncommon for pre-service teachers to experience stress or initial disconnection with their sense of self during the professional experience placement. However, once the pre-service teacher begins to thrive academically and to establish positive relationships with peers, lecturers and other significant persons involved in the professional experience, the reconnection to self and confidence becomes possible.

Mentoring Workshop Development

Stemming from existing research there were three broad aims that served the design for the teacher mentoring workshop: firstly, improve dialogue between the University and the Schools, (House of Representatives, 2007; Kruger et al, 2009); secondly, explore ways to improve mentor/supervising teachers skills, (Rodgers & Raider Roth, 2006; Woods, 2008) and; thirdly, to encourage supervising teachers to pursue their own learning potential through engaging in further (postgraduate) study (Lovat, 2005).
The workshop program was based on a relational pedagogy (Baxter Magolda, 1996) that included the following principles: (1) respect for the individual teacher as a knower, (2) provision of learning opportunities that related to the teacher's personal and professional experiences, (3) facilitation of a constructivist perspective of knowing and learning, and (4) provision of opportunities to access and discuss with other teachers and teacher educators to promote (re)construction of personal epistemological beliefs (cited in Tickle, Brownlee & Nailon, 2005). To support the emerging relationship/partnership with teachers it was critical to make room for a

safe and non-threatening environment, where the teachers together with academics, and principals collaboratively shared, reflected, and explored issues relating to the future of the teaching profession. Consciousness-raising is a participatory process where participants are encouraged to share openly their experiences and thoughts in relation to mentoring or supervising beginning teachers, teaching and learning, teacher standards, and in particular issues concerning placements with others in a regular group processes.

Method

The research project was based on narrative research (Creswell, 2002; Kerlin, 2002; Merriam, 2002). Narrative inquiry as noted by Thomas (2012) recognizes that what people say is valid and does not have to be verified against traditional criteria in order to count as knowledge. The use of narrative research was particularly suitable in this study to describe the classroom teachers' experiences during the mentoring workshop program. Here:

> Narrative research refers to any study that uses or analyses narrative material. The data can be collected as a story or in different manner. It can be the object of the research or a means for the study of another question It may be used for comparison among groups, to learn about a social phenomenon or historical period, or to explore a personality. (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998, pp. 2-3)

Approval to conduct the research was obtained from the University's Ethics Committee.

Participants

A letter of invitation was sent to all school Principals around regional NSW and Victoria with a follow up phone call to confirm teacher (un)-availability and interest in partaking in the mentoring workshop program. Teaching relief in the form of $250.00 per participating teacher was provided as an incentive to cover cost. In addition to encourage teachers to take on further postgraduate study the workshop provided the opportunity to have their attendance at the workshop together with two completed reflective assignments credited towards one subject when enrolled in the Master's by coursework program. All participants irrespective of enrolling in the Master's program were provided with a certificate of attendance. In total ninety-one qualified classroom teachers from regional areas in NSW and Victoria (including Primary and High school Principals, Deputy Principals and Head Teachers) (76 female, 14 male) see table 1 participated in the five workshop programs that involved 2 hour long focus group discussions between 24 July 2009, and 17 May 2010. Not all schools in the region were able to send teachers to the workshop program because the dates did not suit - being an "unusually busy time". All participants were provided with written information about the study and to protect participants identities they were all provided with pseudonyms.

Date:	Participating teachers.
24 July 2009	11 Victorian High-school teachers (9 female, 2 male) (Term 3)
8 August 2009	22 NSW High-school teachers (14 female, 8 male), (Term 3)
6 November 2009	17 NSW/VIC Primary and EC Teachers (13 female, 4 male), (Term 4)
11 November 2009	20 NSW/VIC Primary and EC Teachers (20 female), (Term 4)
17 May 2010	21 NSW/VIC EC Teachers (21 female)

Table 1. Mentoring workshop dates and participants.

Data Analysis

To answer the overarching research question, *How do classroom supervising teachers experience their roles as supervisors to preservice teachers?* The data collected and analysed from the five Teacher Mentoring workshops included, 5 focus group discussions and email correspondence. The focus group discussions were based on the following six broad questions that were audio recorded and later transcribed.

1. What is a good mentor/supervisor? (Crasborne et al., 2008; Elder, 2010; Rodger & Raider Roth, 2006; Woods, 2008)
2. What are some of your concerns when supervising pre-service teachers? (Comstock et al., 2008; Keogh et al., 2006; Rodger & Raider Roth, 2006; Woods, 2008)
3. In what ways do you want to be supported by your school leaders and the University to enable you to supervise pre-service teachers more effectively? (Australian Parliament, 2007, Keogh et al, 2006, Kruger et al., 2009; Ure, 2009).
4. What is learning? (Author, 2010; Jensen, 2010)
5. What does it mean to be a teacher in the 21st century? (Australian Parliament, 2007; Kruger et al., 2009)
6. How important is further study to your own professional development? (Australian Parliament, 2007; Jensen, 2010; Lovat 2005).

The audio transcripts were transcribed and a narrative analysis (Thorne, 2001) was used as a strategy to analyse the five focus group data. The analysis involved coding the data into major themes to provide deeper understandings and insights into participants' lived experiences. The analysis of the focus group discussions was completed in the following sequence: transcription of the five focus group discussions; reading and familiatrizing with the transcribed data; coding the data of the stories into common themes. This involved identifying the stories being told, the direction and contradictions that emerged as well as identifying commonalities and differences among the groups / participating teachers and documenting the re-telling of the stories.

Findings and Discussion

The following section will report on the findings of the mentoring workshop program. Based on participants responses in the focus group discussions and their email correspondence the following five themes emerged; (1) Communication and care, (2) Conflicting expectations, (3) Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century (4) Relationship-building, (5), Professional development

Communication and Care

There was an agreement among all teachers in the five workshops that good mentoring involves caring for the pre-service teacher and to be able to communicate clearly what the pre-service teacher needs to work on whilst on the practicum. Diane, a primary school teacher explains.

We believe that a good mentor meets the needs of the student that you are mentoring, that you bring the best out in them and that you develop their skills and you recognise their strengths and weaknesses... a good mentor does not only go through the theory, they need to be able to demonstrate what they say in practice.

Dean a high-school teacher captured all of the participants' sentiments about the need for honest feedback to the pre-service teacher.

…the other thing a good mentor has to do is to be brutally honest for the sake of our kids and our colleagues and for the person themselves, we are not just criticizing we are coming from a place of care of being supportive and we got the currency to offer advice with credibility and having said all of that - it means that in a very short time you have to get to know them really well, and how do you do that when you are balancing all the other responsibilities that you have in a school…

The above excerpts suggest a frustration for not being able to take the time needed to provide quality support for the pre-service teacher. This illustrates the difficulties involved in negotiating the daily responsibilities all teachers have to the profession, their students and the limited time available to supervise pre-service teachers. This clearly suggest that more time is needed to be set aside to meet within the school day for open dialogue between the teacher and the pre-service teacher. This has the potential to ensure opportunities for growth fostering relationships for both parties (Comstock et al., 2008; LeCornu and Ewing (2008). The notion of care (O'Connor, 2008, Palmer, 1998) that is embedded in the above responses, suggests a commitment by the teachers to not only to the children in their classrooms, the pre-service teachers but also to the profession (Rodgers & Raider Roth, 2006).

Conflicting Expectations

Conflicting expectations arose as a strong theme from participants' responses. The frustrations that stemmed from this were noted especially among some of the high school teachers; this related to the short time (10 days) pre-service teachers attended the practicum, and that hindered the development of quality professional dialogue about for example, the subject. Richard a high-school teacher explains.

The bit that is frustrating for us as supervising teachers is that you have a pre-service teacher for four weeks and then they leave – in that time there is no time for genuine professional discussion, and there needs to be some opportunity for follow up… I expect students to have curriculum knowledge especially when they teach Year 12 extension English and when they don't have that knowledge then that is a real concern for us…

Another concern that was found among all the participating supervising teachers related to the pre-service teacher's initiative in making the initial contact with the school and their allocated supervising teacher. Richard elaborates.

... we have had a contrast between very good people and not so good people… the not so good tend to be people who have a very unrealistic notion of time and effort that is required to prepare material these people seem to need to disappear 3.25pm when in fact you can not operate that way to do a good job… sometimes students turn up for the prac very unfamiliar with the processes and the etiquette of the school and in the classroom it is important that student teachers' have a presence and that means that they have to be mentally prepared to act as teachers not like school leavers.

What makes the placement of pre-service teachers especially difficult in the 21st century, does not only relate to the lack of professional experience placements, but to many pre-service teachers working either part-time or full-time to support themselves and or their

families. Supervising teachers are rightly concerned about the pre-service teacher's seemingly lack of commitment to the profession and, at the same time they empathize with the pre-service teacher's situation. The transition from being a recent school leaver to that of a pre-service teacher can be challenging for many pre-service teachers completing a professional experience placement at a high-school setting in their first year of teacher education. According to most of the participating supervising teachers, how to behave and how to relate to the profession during the practicum should be a shared responsibility between both the school and the university staff. Jane a high-school classroom teacher explains.

Supervision of students should not be left to supervising teachers only the principal should be spending some time with the student, the university lecturer should also come in to watch the student teacher. Matching the student to the teacher would be helpful as there are teachers who should not have student teachers. There has to be a balance of what the school can cope with and it has to be planned at risk students is a concern as it is hard to fail students.

A concern that is highlighted is to understand the process of supporting pre-service teachers at risk of failing. Most university professional experience units provide guidelines about what to do and who to contact at the University for support. Even so, this is an area that causes many supervising teachers un-necessary stress. From the relational-cultural perspective a way of interpreting a pre-service teacher at risk is to see the student as not ready to advance to the next stage in their journey towards becoming a teacher. This disconnection from learning to become a teacher is a growth fostering opportunity where the pre-service teacher is made aware of what he or she needs to do to help him or her to reconnect to their journey of becoming a teacher. Naturally, it is up to the pre-service teacher to accept (or to reject) the advice they have been given. From this perspective placing a pre-service teacher 'at risk' or *allowing* the pre-service teacher to 'fail' is about supporting both the pre-service teacher and the profession.

All participating teachers believed that to support future pre-service teachers' development as teachers' supervision and mentoring should be an on-going process. Mary explains how this should be done.

Mentoring should be ongoing, expectations should be clear, we should be available as a critical friend, be positive and provide constructive feedback and to do this well sometimes it is good to know the background of the student both personal and professional, if they have been at risk student we should know that maybe they have been at risk because they have clashed with a teacher but we should be aware of that…but they need to reflect on their growth and to be self critical.

The above excerpt highlights the importance of mentoring skills to better support pre-service teachers. There are many pre-service teachers who are not as reflective about becoming teachers as perhaps is hoped for. Taffe (2009) suggests that many pre-service teachers in their first year of study, and who have recently left school need more time to learn and understand the complexity of what it means to be a teacher. He suggests that it is important for the supervising teacher to recall the time he or she was a novice pre-service teacher and remember some of the challenges they themselves experienced during the practicum. There are many reasons why some classroom teachers do not want to supervise pre-service teachers, for example, where having a pre-service teacher in the classroom adds to the already heavy workload, and or the classroom teacher feels a need to up-date his or her out-dated supervisory skills (Author, 2010),

Relationship-building Between the University and the Schools.

It was acknowledged by all supervising teachers that the practicum provides a learning experience for both the supervising teacher and the pre-service teacher. An interest in learning was especially encouraging and this was exemplified by teachers expressing their interest about finding out from the pre-service teacher what they were learning at the university.

It would be good if we could learn the latest from them (pre-service teachers) it would be good if they could be sharing what they learn at University. There needs to be some structure allowing time for getting to know what they are learning at uni.

From the above comments the request for further understanding about the latest developments in teaching and learning as it occurs in the university – and how it translates into practice – was highlighted. This strongly suggests that the relationship between the university and school site needs to be further developed to enhance not only the learning outcomes of the pre-service teacher on professional experience placement but also that of the mentoring teacher (Australian Parliament 2007; Kruger et al., 2009).

There was an agreement among all teachers that to improve the relationship between the university and school to discuss some of the challenges of the practicum a concerted effort from both parties was needed, John a Primary school Principal provided ideas as to how this could be done.

To improve communication between the university and school, the university liaison needs to come out to schools and talk about expectations and issues about the pre-service placement. We need to have in-school meetings with pre-service teachers and university staff who need to present a talk about the placement and requirements.

Supervising teachers' interest in forming a closer partnership with the university provided a platform to explore their thoughts about teaching and learning in the 21st Century.

Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century

Discussions about teaching and learning in the 21st Century for most of the participating high-school teachers meant keeping up to date with technology, knowing how to teach effectively using technology and to provide learning opportunities that keep students engaged in their learning. Dean, a middle school teacher, explains,

We need to be teachers who can engage these multi-tasking, multi skilled, technology driven students we need to keep up with that… We need to make sure that we prepare our students for unknown occupations not just the (graduate) teachers who may be looking at 10 to 20 occupations in their career… so how do we motivate these students to go forward, to create these pathways and to keep their eyes wide open when we don't know what the path ways ultimately is going to be…

Similar to the high school teachers beliefs about technology, many primary teachers believed that while technology has become an important factor in students lives, students needed to be explicitly taught how to use technology to help them learn. Stephen, a primary school Principal, explains,

As a teacher, personally I find the whole idea of this technology based learning fantastic but I am still learning how to make sure that no child slips through the net but at the same time not holding them back so much that they are not learning what I want them to learn – it is to find the balance between the books and the technology. Children learn how to copy and paste things but that is not enough, one fellow had a picture of Adolf Hitler he had copied and pasted but when I asked him anything about Germany, he had no idea where Germany was or that it was a country.

The main concern among the teachers from all school sectors was about the increasing misuse of technology, in particular the use of Facebook and its impact on students' socialisation.

Technology is taking away the social aspect of children being children. Children think they have these great conversations on Facebook with their 600 friends. It is a bit scary when children want to be your

friend on Facebook. Concentration should be on socialisation and communication skills and these needs to be well established before they use Face book and we have to take leadership in this.

Not all teachers thought that technology was the main focus in teaching and learning in the 21st century, Lee a primary school teacher explains.

Teaching in the 21st century is busy, it is very busy. Teachers are now more accountable for every little thing, we have to have everything documented. You are not just a teacher, you are everything, a counsellor, a nurse, a mum and yes, the importance of IT skills is getting more and more important. But you also have to be a good communicator you are obviously dealing with parents, colleagues, kids, and other professionals. It is not only about teaching facts but teaching students how to learn. It is about catering to individual needs, recognizing learning styles, differentiation, having your base lesson and then cater for specific groups and needs… it is about embracing new theories, multiple intelligences, Reggio, Early year and Middle year strategies.

Most of the supervising teachers and Principals alike believed that the continuous need for testing represented a return to the past and where a good teacher was recognized as someone who was 'teaching to the test'. This according to Mike, a Primary Principal was especially concerning.

The assumptions of principles have been altered. We have been in institutions with firm beliefs that children learn at different rates and learn in different ways and the whole social interaction and that learning comes gradually. What we are assuming now is that children in year 3, 5, 7, and 9 have a benchmark level of literacy to understand numeracy tests. That children all learn at the same rate and understand tests all given the same style and that they are buckets to be filled up with knowledge. They have to be now because they have to know their numbers from 1 to 30 by the time they finish Kinda and they have to know Year 7 and 8 maths by the time they finish Year 6. There is properly the view among parents that a teacher's kids Year 5 results decide next year's teacher or school.

The increased pressure upon extrinsic, linear testing is highlighted as another characteristic of teaching and learning in the 21st century. Similar to the misuse of technology which can detract from learning, there are strong indications that a homogenous approach to testing can also detract from a more holistic approach to learning.

Professional Development

Most of the teachers agreed and believed that professional development, or further study, is important to the continuous improvement of the teaching profession. There were a number of different suggestions as to how this could be done at the school level and by whom. Dean a high school-teacher notes.

It is absolutely essential to keep up to date with current issues and trends – it needs to be implemented and instilled as regular practice not seen as discrete and sporadic throughout the year. It would be good to do one hour professional reading that is seen as professional development and it could be sourced from a number of areas. From external providers as far as Education department and schools goes is the most expensive option but it also can be done through staff. Staff needs to be recognised… we do have areas we are passionate about and that we can actually relay to staff, and also inter-staff, there needs to be open dialogue between schools to find out – you know, this teacher here has this area of expertise and maybe they could come and speak to our staff rather than try to keep it as an insular environment within your own school.

In terms of the support provided by the department of education, questions were raised about the department's lack of ongoing support in teachers' professional development. John, a Primary school Principal explains.

The education department for example provides technology but does not provide ongoing professional development and that does not make sense… support is needed to work the technology… so providing thousands of dollars worth of technology but only providing one hour professional development to use that technology is often counter productive. Clearly providing ongoing professional training reduces the fear of the unknown and also to help provide an environment that allow teachers to say I do not know… to allow an environment that supports and nurtures professional discussion and also dissent… which is a word that seems to going out of our own professional

development, we are not given room to disagree based on professional experience and professional knowledge… dissent is a word that I think we need to start implementing again and it needs to be factored into a healthy work life ethic.

The need for spaces for authentic professional development was strongly indicated in these quotes. Currently there exists a large gap for both formal and informal spaces for professional dialogue. There is no doubt about that teachers have a need to share what they know as well as a want to learn that they can connect the learning to the context of their teaching (Darling-Hammond & Laughlin, 2011), Darling-Hammond and Laughlin (2011, p.84), note the following,

> Professional development activities must allow teachers to engage actively in cooperative experiences that are sustained over time and to reflect on the process as well as on the content of what they are learning.

The Workshop

The following section will report on participating teachers' thoughts about the mentoring workshop program. These responses were based on participants email correspondence following the workshop. Four general themes emerged; 1) Positive relationships between the university and the schools, 2) Ensuring school support for the profession (preservice teacher placements), 3) Supporting classroom teachers in their role as mentors/associate teachers and 4) Supporting classroom teachers to undertake further study (i.e. Masters).

Positive relationships Between the University and the Schools

The appreciation for developing a closer relationship with the university became evident. The shared concerns between the university and the schools about the direction of teacher education proved to be the catalyst for opening up conversation and in supporting relationship-building between the university and the schools.

> As an assessment of yesterday's Mentors and Mentoring workshop, I found the day enlightening. For the first time, a university has offered a day to explain its processes, objectives and constraints to qualify its pre-service program.
> What a wonderful concept! Knowing how the university runs its education programs gives teachers valuable insight into what preservice teachers are doing pre and post coming into school situations.
> It is great to be part of a forum that values our input. I believe that days like this can only encourage teachers to value the needs of preservice teachers and bridge the gap that may exist. Being informed about what students actually undertake before coming to schools and further insight into what is expected of them is valued information for us for the future.

Ensuring School Support for the Profession (Preservice Teacher Placements).

The successful placement of middle school preservice teachers in term 3 suggested that after their participation in the workshop program school Principals', Deputy Principals, Head teachers, classroom teachers and school practicum coordinators began to understand and to appreciate the complexities and restrictions experienced by the university's professional experience office personnel in their search for good quality placements. Understandably schools too experience issues that are 'out of their control' that at times make it difficult and they have to renege on their promise of having preservice teachers e.g., the associate teacher goes on long service leave, transfer, resigns or fall ill. What seems to be crucial in securing placements is the relationship between the key people in schools and

university. Such relationships allow for problems being solved quickly and proactively as well as ensure placements.

> I attended the excellent in-service at the university last month based around ideas of how to assist Preservice teachers. You mentioned that the university were considering pairing up 4th year students with classroom teachers (as assistants/support?) at the beginning of 2010 to see the process involved in setting up a classroom at the start of a teaching year. I was just wondering how this project is progressing. I would love to welcome one into my classroom (as would a few other teachers I've mentioned this to). If you could get back to me before the end of the school year with an update, that would be fantastic and thanks for the wonderful in-service!

Supporting classroom teachers to take on further postgraduate study (Masters)

While there are no definite numbers available as to how many of the participating teachers would have taken up on the offer of the Masters program there was a definite interest among many to find out more about the Masters course. It was acknowledged that further study is essential to remain current on trends and issues in education. There was an agreement among all participating teachers for on-going professional development by both University settings as well as education departments on both sides of the border.

> What I got most from the workshop was motivation to further my own personal study and begin to undertake my Master's degree. While I did find the workshop useful regarding mentoring, I think I am in a unique position that I am not so long out of uni that I forget what it was like to be a prac student but I have been out enough years to gain experience that would be useful to a prac student and assist in mentoring their progress. It did offer me a bit of an insight into what was 'proper' mentoring (for want of a better word) and it also gave me a bit more of a compassionate view of the prac student, so often we can place our own expectations on these students and these expectations can be completely unrealistic.
>
> Just from the interaction I have had with your university staff, their well of knowledge and their encouragement for me to learn, was enough for me to apply to undertake my Masters…

Towards a Shared Sense of Purpose

Overall, the comments indicated that many teachers are placed in a situation where they are expected to mentor and supervise pre-service teachers without feeling themselves to be adequately prepared or supported in the role.

Outlined in Table 2 is an overview of how university and school concerns can potentially be addressed utilising the principles of relational-cultural theory (Miller & Stiver, 1997).

University concerns	School concerns	Relational-cultural Theory
Mentoring tensions Concerns of rejections rate The quality of supervision Lack of progression towards postgraduate study	Classroom teacher's voices regarding supervision. Communication and Care Conflicting expectations 21st Century Teaching and Learning Relationship building Professional development	Growth- fostering relationships Mutual empathy Authenticity Empowerment (Comstock et al., 2008; Jordan, 1997; Miller & Stiver, 1997

Table 2. Relationship building

As can be seen from the above table illustrating some of the tensions between the university and school from the university's perspective related to rejections from schools to take on pre-service teachers for their practicum, and for schools the tension related to unfamiliarity with the university requirements and the supervising teacher's lack of knowledge as how to supervise the pre-service teacher. From a relational-cultural perspective this opens up opportunities for growth fostering relationships for both the University and the school (Comstock et al., 2008). Findings from this study suggested University-School relationships needed to be based on mutual empathy, authenticity and empowerment in order to benefit both partners (Comstock et al., 2008). Concerns that were identified such as, the supervising teacher's lack of understanding of at risk procedures that in turn relates to supervision and or mentoring skills and their interest in further study i.e., post graduate study and or professional development. These areas provide opportunities for relationship building between the University and school.

The disconnection to the pre-service is acutely experienced by the supervising teacher in instances where they are not prepared specifically for the role. The need for closer relations with the university and in particular a greater understanding of the practicum requirements was seen as a way to rectify some of the concerns. The workshop clearly met a perceived need by providing an opportunity to explore mentoring / supervision and pre-service education in an open, frank and intellectually stimulating way. Most importantly it enabled the development of a shared sense of purpose and an alignment of mission and values between the university, teachers and schools. A major benefit of the workshop for all concerned has been that participating schools have subsequently been much more open to, and enthusiastic about placements of pre-service teachers. Finally, the workshop highlighted the importance of empowering supervising teachers' perspectives through a relational-cultural framework – that can be viewed as a key to enhancing mentoring relationships.

An interesting and unexpected finding from the workshop program was the number of participating teachers who later expressed interest in postgraduate study and who subsequently pursued this option (Masters and PhD programs in education). Unfortunately, numbers of teachers pursuing postgraduate study has not been made available. This warrants further research but the following conclusion is tentatively offered here. That is, to ensure the future of quality teaching in Australia the offer of a viable pathway and an incentive for teachers to move towards further postgraduate study should be made available to all interested teaching professionals.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to illustrate how the relationship building process between schools and universities can develop to enhance pre-service teacher supervision. An authentic school-university nexus strongly influences how pre-service teachers and supervising teachers communicate, interact and learn. Relationship building also has strong implications upon the direction and depth of professional formation for both students and supervisors. Sharing the perspectives of pre-service teacher supervisors has twofold implications: it provides insights into the complexities of the mentoring process, as well as indicating suggestions towards empowering their capabilities. Increasing awareness of these narratives allows both schools and universities to enhance their preparation of both students and supervisors so that the pre-service period fosters rich and productive learning. Authentic and mutually-supportive relationship building provides a strong foundation for students and supervisors to develop their professional identities and contribute to the empowerment of teacher development.

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