Working in Three-Part Harmony: Expectations of Cooperating Teachers as a Foundation for Collaboration

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Cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and student teachers often have differing, unspoken expectations when they enter the student teaching experience. Since alignment of expectations provides the basis for productive collaboration, teacher preparation programs must understand and facilitate the alignment of these expectations as they prepare to meet the new InTASC standards requiring mastery of collaboration. Based on the earlier work of Rajuan et al., this study used focus groups to collect data from cooperating teachers, student teachers, and university supervisors regarding their expectations for the role of the cooperating teacher. The data were coded based on six areas of orientation toward the role of the cooperating teacher. Using these orientations, this article compares stakeholders' expectations of the role of cooperating teachers and explores how those expectations can serve as a foundation for collaboration.

Introduction

Cooperating teachers, university supervisors/field coordinators, and student teachers are often in a quandary when they enter the student teaching experience. Frequently, they receive mixed messages when they try to answer a seemingly simple question: what are your expectations for the role that cooperating teachers will play?

Everyone involved has expectations of the cooperating teachers, even when they are unspoken. For example, expectations are generated by the teacher preparation program's requirements, as

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implemented by an assigned university supervisor (assigned observer). Cooperating teachers have their own expectations regarding classroom procedures, and these may conflict with what the student teachers have learned to expect in their college courses. And, of course, all stakeholders have their own perceptions of what is expected from their individual roles in the experience. Unfortunately, this lack of clarity about expectations can undermine everyone's ability to collaborate in maximizing the student teaching experience.

The critical importance of collaboration in teacher preparation is articulated in Standard #10 of the Model Core Teaching Standards recently developed by the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC). Central to the InTASC Standards is the idea that every student should learn to the highest possible level. This idea is only possible in a culture of collaboration where teachers regularly examine their own and each other's practice through self-reflection and collaboration, providing the collegial support and feedback that assures a continuous cycle of self-improvement. This enhanced role for collaboration represents a new paradigm for education and a challenge to the status quo (Hill, Stumbo, Paliokas, Hansen, & McWalters, 2010).

As teacher preparation institutions implement programs that address this new, enhanced role for collaboration, an important consideration is the student teaching experience itself. That experience is based, in part, on effective personal relationships among the participants. However, the development of these relationships can be either helped or hindered by the participants' expectations of one another. For example, cooperating teachers and student teachers often hold dissimilar expectations about the need for a personal relationship in the student teaching experience (Rajuan, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2007). In addition, university supervisors appear to be unclear or uncertain regarding expectations for the cooperating teacher (Woods & Weasmer, 2003).

Background and Rationale

Expectations

Research regarding expectations is well established in the social sciences. In fact, some of the best-known research about the topic relates to how teacher expectations in the classroom setting can affect student performance, either positively or negatively. This influence of expectations, as demonstrated in the classroom setting, holds true for relationships in other areas as well (Manolis, Harris, & Whittler, 1998; Rosenthal, 1994; Rubie-Davies, 2010). In fact, in any relationship the expectations held by the people in that relationship will determine the behaviors they each display. People will change their behaviors to meet the expectations of the other person in the relationship and act in ways expected by the other (Copeland, 1993; Holmes, 2002; Russell, Gowaty, Harland, & Martin, 1979; Schul & Benbenishty, 1985; Young, 2007). Because expectations are, in a sense, the building blocks for a successful relationship, they have significant potential to affect the quality of the work produced through the relationship (Taris, Feij, & Capel, 2006).

One of the key factors in this reciprocal dance of expectations is alignment. Unless everyone's expectations are in alignment and all parties in the relationship are believed to be reliable, it is difficult to develop trust (Rotter, 1967). When individuals' expectations are not aligned, a strong and productive relationship is unlikely to develop because they are less apt to find the relationship to be a rewarding experience (Collins, Kennedy, & Francis, 1976; Irving & Montes, 2009). A lack of alignment in expectations could include something as basic as the setting for a collaborative effort. Or it could involve specific details about the collaboration and/or the amount of knowledge each person possesses (Naismith, Lee, & Pilkington, 2011). Ultimately, unaligned expectations can hinder the development of solid relationships and prevent effective collaboration from occurring.

Collaboration

Collaboration is no longer optional; it is expected of today's teachers. The inclusion of collaboration in the InTASC Standards recognizes this growing need for teachers to collaborate (Hindin, Morocco, Mott, & Aguilar, 2007). Training in collaboration is being fueled by the belief that it will bring about the professional growth needed to develop innovative approaches — approaches that will close the achievement gap in student learning (Levine & Marcus, 2007; Wackerhausen, 2009).

For example, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act mandates that special education and general education teachers collaborate to develop programs that will allow all students to master the highest learning standards (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Heward, 2009). General education teachers who use strategies acquired in collaboration with special education teachers benefit in many areas of instruction, including pedagogy, classroom management, curriculum development, and assessment (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006; Stiggins & DuFour, 2009). Another example of the push for teacher collaboration can be found in the most recent science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) initiatives (Baker-Doyle & Yoon, 2011). And finally, teacher collaboration is being advocated as an effective means of professional development through the promotion of learning communities and other types of teacher networks (Woodrow Wilson Teaching Fellowships, 2011).

For successful collaboration to occur, a strong professional relationship is essential (Sileo, 2011). As teacher preparation institutions seek to implement InTASC Standard #10 — collaboration — the pre-eminent role of the cooperating teacher during the student teacher experience must be acknowledged (Parker, Allen, Alvarez-McHatton, & Rosa, 2010). In addition, university supervisors have a significant role to play in their position as mediators between schools and university faculties of education (Hulme, Baumfield, & Payne, 2009).

Thus, to support successful collaboration, research is needed to initially identify stakeholders' expectations about the role of the cooperating teacher. All of the partners involved must clearly understand their own and others' expectations. This creates the basis for a dialogue, which can lead to the conscious modeling of collaboration over the course of a student teaching experience.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify the expectations that cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and student teachers hold about cooperating teachers. Modeled after the work of Rajuan et al. (2007), we sought to (a) confirm their findings regarding the expectations held by student teachers and cooperating teachers, and (b) explore the expectations held by university supervisors. Our intent was to further our understanding of what various stakeholders expect from cooperating teachers and to show how these expectations affect collaboration.

Research Questions

Nine focus groups were conducted to address the following specific research questions:

1. What are some similarities and differences in the participants' expectations concerning the role of the cooperating teacher?

2. To what extent do the expectations of the participants agree with the findings of Rajuan et al. (2007)?

Methods

Focus Group Design

Overview. Focus groups were used for this study because they are an established research technique for using group interaction to collect data (Morgan, 1997). The focus groups generated a large amount of interaction and material in a relatively limited period of time, supplying "direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants' opinions and experiences" (Morgan, 1997, p. 10).

Participants. Forty-four (44) voluntary participants were recruited for this study, consisting of 18 elementary student teachers, 18 elementary cooperating teachers, and 8 elementary university supervisors. All were associated with [Name of University] in [City, State]. Participants associated with the [Name of University] College of Education were chosen because this is where the researchers are located. Participants were recruited using two methods: (a) e-mail invitations, and (b) personal interactions during professional development training sessions, seminars, and university supervisor meetings.

Process. Nine focus groups were held during late 2009 and early 2010 at [Name of University] and a neighboring college. Each focus group had between 2 and 10 participants. Session assignments were based on group membership: three focus groups included only cooperating teachers, four groups had only student teachers, and two groups had only university supervisors. Each focus group was asked 8 to 12 questions related to expectations for cooperating teachers (Table 1).

Data Analysis Orientations

In search of a conceptual framework for coding and data analysis, we chose Calderhead and Shorrock's (1997) theoretical scheme as reported in Rajuan et al. (2007). This theory describes five categories of orientation toward teaching and teacher education: "academic," "technical," "practical," "personal," and "critical." Before coding the focus group discussions, the category "disposition," as defined by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), was also added. Thus, six coding criteria were defined and utilized as follows:

Academic Orientation. This emphasizes teachers' subject expertise and views the quality of the teachers' own subject matter knowledge as their professional strength. For example, the following comment was coded as academic orientation: ". . . assisting in preparation for the state assessment tests, Saxon Math is a procedure that they have to follow." Rajuan et al. (2007) also label this orientation as "cognitive."

Table 1. *Focus Group Questions*

Introductions
• Tell me a bit about your undergraduate student teaching experience (CT only).   • Share some of your experiences as a student teacher (ST only).   • Share some experiences you've had as a university field coordinator (US only).   • What do you expect to learn from both cooperating teachers and student teachers (US only)?

Student Teacher-Focused Questions
• What are the attributes, strengths, weaknesses, and areas to improve for student teachers (CT & US only)?   • How have student teachers helped you in your role as a university field coordinator (US only)?   • Why do you want a student teacher/what do you want from them (CT only)?   • What do you expect to learn from your student teacher/what will they learn from you/what are some benefits of taking one (CT only)?   • Have you modified things in your classroom because of a student teacher or resisted change from a student teacher (CT only)?   • What do you look for in a good student teacher, and what would motivate you to give a student teacher a positive recommendation (CT only)?

Cooperating Teacher-Focused Questions
• What is one outstanding attribute you would want in a cooperating teacher (ST & US only)?   • Tell us some strengths of cooperating teachers as well as areas to improve, expectations, etc. (ST & US only).   • How have cooperating teachers helped you as university field coordinators (US only)?   • What are some benefits you receive, expect to learn, etc., from working with a cooperating teacher (ST only)?   • What have you changed or modified as a result of working with a cooperating teacher, and have you resisted any of their suggestions (ST only)?   • What qualities do you look for in a cooperating teacher/what makes a good cooperating teacher (ST only)?

Note. CT = Cooperating Teachers; ST = Student Teachers; US = University Supervisors/Field Coordinators.

Technical Orientation. This emphasizes the knowledge and behavioral skills that teachers require. It is associated with competency-based approaches, and derives from a behaviorist model of teaching and learning. For example, this comment was coded as technical orientation: "At least they have some knowledge of discipline. They have studied discipline where in years past, I don't think they had too much of that." Rajuan et al. (2007) also label this orientation as "mechanical."

Practical Orientation. Also labeled by Rajuan et al. (2007) as "experiential," this orientation emphasizes the artistry and classroom technique of the teacher, viewing the teacher as a craftsperson. This view attaches importance to apprenticeship models of learning to teach. For example, comments like the following were coded as practical orientation: "Yeah, I don't get to see too much modeling by my teacher."

Personal Orientation. This emphasizes the importance of interpersonal relations in the classroom and views learning to teach as a process of "becoming" or personal development. It takes the form of offering a safe environment that encourages exploration and discovery of personal strengths. For example, comments like the following were coded as personal orientation: "I do expect them to sit down with me and let me pick their brains and collaborate with me." Rajuan et al. (2007) also label this as "affective."

Critical Orientation. Labeled by Rajuan et al. (2007) as "social," this orientation emphasizes the role of schools in promoting democratic values and reducing social inequities. It views schooling as a process of social reform. The goal of teacher education is to help teachers become critical, reflective change agents. For example, comments like the following were coded as critical orientation: "You teach the children. I can remember walking out of many staff meetings thinking okay and that's not what will be happening in my classroom because it isn't good for children."

Disposition. As mentioned previously, this is not a Calderhead and Shorrock (1997) category. It was added prior to coding to reflect

professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and nonverbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families, colleagues, and communities. The two professional dispositions that NCATE expects institutions to assess are fairness and the belief that all students can learn (NCATE Standards, 2011). For example, the following statement was coded as a disposition: "You get sick of all the hypocrisy back and forth of what you should do and shouldn't do . . . and then having to keep in mind it's the kids that matter."

Coding

Each focus group was audio recorded and transcribed using QSR NVivo 8 software. All nine sessions were then coded using the six orientations. Four separate coders were used to code the data in an effort to have a balanced, unbiased approach. The coders included the two researchers, a graduate assistant, and a former elementary teacher who works with the College of Education's graduate programs. After compiling the data, inter-rater reliability was found to be 85%. This is comparable to the reliability reported in the data analysis section of Rajuan et al. (2007), on which the coding was based. The high degree of correlation achieved increased our confidence in the findings.

In the process of coding, statements often were applicable to more than one orientation. Thus, cross-coding frequently occurred. For example, under academic orientation we recognized that academic expertise is often embedded within technical and practical issues of immediate concern to a student teacher. So the procedures that cooperating teachers use for teaching mathematics, language arts, or social studies could be cross-coded as academic, technical, and practical, as demonstrated by the following example:

> In the morning (name) is more structured and teaches language arts while in the afternoon (name) is more relaxed with energy levels heightened. Social studies and math are in the afternoon depending on what we are focusing on with our units.

Results

The quantitative results of the focus group discussions are displayed as percentages in Table 2. These percentages refer to the amount of discussion devoted to each orientation. As explained previously, cross-coding occurred when appropriate. Thus, frequently, statements were applicable to, and coded in, more than one orientation, and the percentages shown do not total to 100%.

Table 2. *Percentage of Discussion Devoted to Each Orientation*

	Academic	Technical	Practical	Personal	Critical	Disposition
Cooperating Teachers	25.51	48.22	47.63	41.02	23.98	8.37
Student Teachers	15.78	35.14	42.19	47.52	23.91	13.61
University Supervisors	15.05	38.07	32.61	53.24	31.87	20.80

The results (based on the six coding criteria or orientation categories) suggested the following expectations concerning the role of the cooperating teacher. The first category's (Academic Orientation - cooperating teacher as master of content) results found that none of the three groups indicated that this was one of their primary expectations of cooperating teachers. This finding might indicate that cooperating teachers and university supervisors expect student teachers to have the necessary foundational content knowledge from their college coursework and focus their attention on the other aspects of teaching.

The second category's (Technical Orientation - cooperating teacher as technician) findings found that cooperating teachers indicated that this was a high expectation they had for themselves, but it was less of an expectation with student teachers and university supervisors. One interpretation of the data is that cooperating teachers concentrate more on the procedures, practices, and routines of the daily operations of the classroom based on their previous classroom experiences. Classroom

teachers understand that without effective classroom management little content will be taught and/or learned. Another interpretation might be that cooperating teachers focus more on the technical aspects teaching to model their importance to their assigned student teachers.

The third category's (Practical Orientation - cooperating teacher as a master craftsperson/artist) outcomes show a relatively high expectation among cooperating teachers and student teachers, but was cited less often by university supervisors. Cooperating teachers and student teachers hold the same expectations for each other. The cooperating teacher is modeling what a teacher does, while the student teacher is learning by observing how to teach. Whereas university field supervisors focus upon how the student teacher is progressing and developing in his/her placement.

The fourth category's (Personal Orientation - importance of interpersonal relations in the classroom) results found that this was the highest expectation for cooperating teachers held by both student teachers and university supervisors. However, this orientation was only the third highest held by the cooperating teachers. Cooperating teachers are busily addressing the extensive needs of their classrooms (i.e. students and organization) and do not always have or take the time necessary to build a safe and nurturing environment for their student teachers; one that would foster the personal connection with their student teacher. Student teachers need, desire, and blossom when they (a) feel secure enough to take a risk in their assigned classrooms and have a more personal connection with their cooperating teacher.

The next category's (Critical Orientation - cooperating teacher as social change agent) results were interesting. The cooperating teacher and the student teacher viewed this area with a relatively low expectation. In comparison, this orientation was ranked more highly by university supervisors. Cooperating teachers are too busy assuring the success of their students and student teachers to spend their energies with school reforms.

The final category's (Disposition - cooperating teacher as a model for beliefs and attitudes toward teaching) findings found this to be the lowest expectation for both cooperating teachers and student teachers. It was the second lowest expectation for university supervisors. Due to the demands of the student teaching experience, it is possible that there is not an opportunity for these type of discussions or interactions to occur.

Discussion

In spite of the differences in our methods and participants, our overall results regarding expectations for cooperating teachers are similar to Rajuan et al. (2007). The similarity between the findings of the two studies adds certainty to our understanding of the expectations that cooperating teachers and student teachers hold for the role of the cooperating teacher.

Cooperating Teacher Expectations

First, our findings agree that cooperating teachers hold predominately technical and practical expectations for their role in the student teaching experience. Second, with the exception of our additional orientation, professional disposition, our findings agree that cooperating teachers' lowest expectations for their role can be found in the critical and academic orientations. And third, our findings also agree that cooperating teachers place personal expectations midway between the other orientations.

These findings regarding the predominance of technical and practical expectations suggest that cooperating teachers spend considerable time establishing classroom procedures and processes, and they expect the student teachers to follow them as prescribed. It is important to cooperating teachers that consistency be maintained, no matter who is teaching. This is evidenced by the following comments:

> The overall realization of how much you have to do. I think that's overwhelming to the students, just how much stuff you have to have under your belt, and flexibility . . . changing in midstream and being able to deal with more.

203

> I think one of the things she [i.e., student teacher] was most surprised about, how many interruptions there are, or how many adjustments you have to make . . . you get everything set and it all goes south because this happens or that happens . . . a fire drill, a new student shows up, or the schedules change, or the assembly is cancelled, or you forget to put the assembly in your lesson plan . . . and you just have to be willing to adjust and learn to adjust.

Student Teacher Expectations

First, our findings agree that student teachers identify the personal orientation as their highest expectation for cooperating teachers. Second, our findings agree that student teachers also rank practical and technical expectations highly in relation to cooperating teachers. Finally, again with the exception of the professional disposition orientation, our findings agree that student teachers also place the academic and critical orientations as their lowest expectations for the role of the cooperating teacher.

Student teaching typically occurs during the students' last semester. They have invested a considerable amount of time, energy, and money in their preparation up to this point. They are well aware that this experience is pivotal in becoming a teacher. They are anxious, excited, and perhaps even worried. Thus, they are sometimes unsure and need feedback and support. This is evidenced by their collectively high rating of the personal orientation, emphasizing the social skills needed to properly interact with others. In teaching, the term "interpersonal relationships" in the personal orientation generally refers to communication and listening skills. Student teachers need cooperating teachers to listen to their ideas, questions, and concerns while offering support and guidance.

In their comments in this study, student teachers indicated that they expect their cooperating teachers to (a) emphasize the importance of interpersonal relationships in the classroom, and (b) view learning to teach as a process of becoming or personal development. During the focus group sessions, many student teachers stated that their relationship with their cooperating

teacher could make or break the student teaching experience. This was exemplified by one participant's comment: "It's not going very well. And I think it's just where I'm placed and my cooperating teacher doesn't provide a lot of support in modeling for me." Another participant said, "My cooperating teacher made me feel really good. My teacher has always been very supportive."

University Supervisor Expectations

Rajuan et al. (2007) did not examine the expectations of university supervisors, so no direct comparison is available. However, our research found that university supervisors have very high expectations of cooperating teachers when it comes to the personal orientation. In fact, this was the most discussed orientation among any group (53.24%), exemplified by statements such as, "I want the cooperating teacher to be kind to students." Expectations for the technical and practical orientations were next. They expect cooperating teachers to emphasize the knowledge and behavioral skills that teachers require.

In addition, university supervisors indicated much higher expectations for the critical orientation and professional disposition when compared to the other two groups. This rating is likely due to the university supervisors' view of the whole picture of student teaching; they understand that all aspects of teaching are interdependent.

University supervisors in our research setting are retired educators who love teaching and want to continue to work in education in a different capacity (i.e., give back to their profession). They typically have the same expectations for their student teachers as they had for their own school-aged students; they want them to be successful and will work diligently to help this occur. Likewise, they want other adults who work with their student teachers to have those same expectations.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. It is specific to one college of education, and it did not involve secondary student teachers. In addition, the cross-coding of focus group statements did not allow

a direct comparison to all of the results of the Rajuan et al. (2007) study. Nonetheless, given the similarity of the results to previous studies, we believe our results deepen our understanding of stakeholders' expectations of the cooperating teacher in the student teaching experience.

Conclusion

The new InTASC standards recognize the importance for an enhanced role for collaboration in the teaching profession and see this importance as presenting a new paradigm for teacher preparation. In rethinking teacher preparation to address the new paradigm, social research is clear regarding the importance of alignment of expectations as the foundation for collaboration. The student teaching experience presents an opportunity to foster and teach enhanced collaboration since it takes place in an authentic setting where the cooperating teachers themselves are expected to demonstrate a high level of collaboration with their colleagues in the school building.

It has long been know that, under the right conditions, both cooperating teachers and student teachers can grow professionally from the student teaching experience (Landt, 2004). This creates a sharper focus on collaboration as a win-win situation for the student and for the cooperating teacher. For collaboration specifically, the right conditions must include an alignment of expectations. Unfortunately, in the traditional student teaching experience, the parties involved are assumed to be able to successfully align their expectations and collaborate — a questionable assumption at best (Bacharach, Washut-Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010).

Collaboration in the student teaching experience would be much improved if the expectations held for (and by) cooperating teacher were transparent and explicit. Graves (2010) notes that explicit expectations, ongoing communication, and adequate time are vital to the development of the positive relationships that make a high level of collaboration possible. Making explicit these expectations, and holding the facilitated dialogue necessary to understand them,

would benefit all stakeholders and serve as a foundation for the collaborative relationship to develop (Woods & Weasmer, 2003).

New paradigms require new ideas. But, at minimum, the characteristics of the collaboration oriented placements of today hold promise as a place to start. In these placements, the university supervisor facilitates an initial dialogue between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher regarding the enhanced role of collaboration that InTASC requires in student teacher preparation. With collaboration as a focus, the upcoming placement becomes a co-teaching experience. For example, perhaps the student teacher is assigned specific small groups to work with while the cooperating teacher works with other small groups. In this manner, classroom teachers can feel confident that their classroom routine will not be disrupted (technical orientation); in the planning and sharing of responsibility, student teachers can feel that their needs are met for a more personal orientation. Each day, planning meetings between cooperating teachers and student teachers are held either prior to class or after. In these planning meetings, the partners involved begin to clearly understand their own and the others' expectations. With alignment of expectations and collaboration explicit as a goal, the planning and review process can lead to the conscious modeling of collaboration over the course of the student teaching experience.

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