SEPARATING SUPERVISORY ROLES IN A NEW ZEALAND STUDENT TEACHING PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT *A persistent international problem in teacher education supervision is the dilemma between working with a teacher as a friendly colleague and simultaneously having to evaluate the teacher. In New Zealand, educators at the University of Waikato resolve this dilemma by separating the liaison and evaluative roles of the university supervisor. The model was explored through analysis of the perspectives of, and dialogues between student teachers, associate teachers, liaison and evaluative lecturers. While common supervisory tasks overlap, differentiated supervisory roles were seen during observations, heard in conference dialogue, and identified on student teacher surveys.*

A persistent international problem in teacher supervision is the dilemma between working with a teacher as a friendly colleague and simultaneously having to evaluate the teacher. American educators Garman, Glickman and Glathorn (Acheson & Gall, 1992) have begun to address the issue in North America. Similarly, British educators have identified the need for research about the unclear role perceptions of teacher supervisors (Bennett, Dunne, & Harvard, 1995) and the need for differentiated support (Dormer, 1994). The School of Education at the University of Waikato, has attempted to resolve this dilemma by separating the liaison and evaluative roles of the university supervisor. During the Waikato teaching practice, each student teacher confers with his or her associate teacher as well as two university staff members with different supervisory functions. Supervision of student teachers is shared between a liaison lecturer and an evaluative lecturer. This separation of roles was designed in response to requests by students, and associate teachers who felt that student teachers needed a teacher evaluator plus a confidante who did not assess their teaching (McGee, 1996).

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of differentiated student teacher supervision in a New Zealand primary teacher- education programme through analyses of the perspectives of, and dialogue between student teachers, associate teachers, and liaison and evaluative lecturers.

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO PRIMARY TEACHING PRACTICE

Each of the first three years of the four-year Waikato programme includes a practicum component. In the first year, student teachers complete not only two school-based weeks prior to course work but also a block of four weeks towards the end of the first year. They also undertake a six-week teaching practice in year two, and a seven- week experience in year three. There is no block of field experience in the fourth year.

SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES AND ROLES

The liaison lecturer checks that things are going smoothly, sorts out problems, and enhances the partnership with schools (Hawkworth & Lang, 1995). At a group briefing prior to teaching practice, liaison lecturers establish relationships and provide information to student teachers about university expectations. In the early weeks of teaching practice they conduct group meetings at each school with student teachers, associate teachers, principals, and liaison teachers who act as go-between with the university. During these meetings they answer questions and provide reminders about university work, recent research, or Ministry of Education initiatives. When student teacher difficulties are identified the liaison lecturer continues contact with the affected parties through phone calls and additional visits until the difficulty is resolved. Liaison lecturers do not make classroom observations or assess student teachers. They may give extra instruction to neophyte associate teachers or act as sounding boards for principals.

Each liaison lecturer is responsible for 30-40 student teachers who are placed in rural and urban schools in the same geographic area. To maintain continuous contact with the schools, each liaison lecturer is assigned to the same area each year. They usually visit each school at least once each practicum block.

The associate teachers model teaching, assist in joint unit planning, and provide daily feedback regarding the teaching performance of the student teacher. They document student teacher observations in a binder that can be examined by the evaluative lecturer and may provide suggestions for improvement of the programme.

Once in the first year and at least twice in second and third year practica, the evaluative lecturer observes student teaching, and confers with student teachers about their teaching. In addition, the lecturer elicits associate teacher and principal or liaison teacher perceptions regarding the student teacher and writes an end of practice report assessing the competence of each student teacher in their cohort.

PROCEDURES

I used a naturalistic case study methodology to explore the nature of supervision and the enactment of the various roles in the Waikato model. The Waikato teaching practice coordinator recommended an experienced liaison lecturer who assisted me in every way.

I took field notes while observing Lily, the liaison lecturer, brief her 36 student teachers on campus, prior to their seven-week, year-three practice teaching. Later, I shadowed her group meetings at six schools. On her recommendation based on driving distance and associate teacher experience, I asked six female student teachers and their associate teachers in two different schools if they would participate in my research. Then I contacted the two school principals and two evaluative lecturers assigned to those schools. I received written permission from all participants to record all conferences between the student teachers and their supervisors at two rural schools.

Next I tracked the initial conference between the liaison lecturer and one student teacher who was dissatisfied in her placement. In the following weeks I

documented all follow-up communications leading to her transfer to another school.

On my second visit to the schools, I took field notes, observed the remaining five student teachers' lessons and audio-taped the associate teachers' post observation discussions. Then all student teachers completed a survey administered by me. They indicated with a five-point (seldom-frequently) Likert-type scale, how frequently their liaison lecturer, associate teacher, evaluative lecturer and student teacher peers discussed: practical tips, encouragement, things right, things wrong, theoretical issues, intellectual challenge, counselling, and assessment. The themes listed above and defined on the survey, were adapted from a British study of student teacher mentoring (Bennett, Dunne, & Harvard, 1995).

Two weeks later, in another two day period, I collected field notes, classroom observations, and conference audio recordings involving the same five student-teachers and their two university evaluative lecturers.

Data Analysis

All data were transcribed to computer disc, separated into thought units, numbered, then collated under the different roles and themes derived from the survey. Data analysis and preliminary drafts of this paper were sent to the Waikato Primary Teaching Practice Coordinator for audit and editing (Patton, 1990).

SUPERVISORY ROLES IN ACTUAL PRACTICE

Below I describe and comment on a day in the life of a liaison lecturer, associate/student teacher discussions, evaluative lecturer/student teacher conferences, and student teachers' perceptions of topics discussed by their three role differentiated supervisors. All participants have been given pseudonyms.

Day in the Life of a Liaison Lecturer

Lily, the liaison lecturer, and I squint against the 7:30 am light enroute to our first school. As we travel to schools, we begin a repeated pattern of exchanging ideas about serving teachers and student teachers as university educators. I share my ten year Canadian supervision experience, Lily draws from her New Zealand liaison work. After each school visit she asks for comments and confirmation of her impressions and interpretations. I seek clarification of her intentions and actions and reinforce the common perceptions we share.

At our first of six stops, Lily leaves me conversing with a cluster of student teachers, while she seeks the school principal. Failing in this, she returns and enters the dialogue with the students. After that exchange, she moves to the associate teacher group for a similar discussion. Before we leave Lily locates the principal and briefly reinforces the relationship between them.

Group meeting membership

By the end of the day I realize Lily has visited six sites ranging from a two-room rural to a thirty-room urban school and talked to groups with various membership. Her flexible groupings accommodate different school contexts and a tight time schedule. In three schools she held separate meetings for the students and associate teachers. In one school she talked only to the associate teachers as both student teachers were away. In two schools she talked for twenty minutes to each principal. In another two schools, where the trust between student and associate teacher was high, she held three-way conversations with the student, associate teacher, and herself. In all cases, she left her business card and an invitation to call her after hours if further contact were needed.

Lily spent over half of her day conversing with student teachers. Associate teachers were in her company one third of the time, and principals received a tenth of her time.

Nature of discussion with student teachers

Sixteen percent of her day was used in asking questions and answering student-teacher inquiries. She asked about the school context (pupils, curriculum, parents) and relationships with associate teachers. The students asked her about assignments and when evaluative lecturers would arrive. Eighteen percent of her dialogue provided encouragement, challenges, and reminders such as teaching across curriculum areas.

Two student teachers with problems took a quarter of her day and three hours of follow-up work. Both student teachers had troubled relationships with their associate teachers. Ann, described by her associate teacher as being like "a bungy jumper waiting six days before she actually does it," wanted to begin teaching before the observation week was complete. Lily negotiated an earlier teaching date and the problem was resolved.

Fiona, the second student teacher, had philosphic differences and a series of complaints about her associate. They included the teacher outlining pupil art work with a dark pen, speaking about children's problems within earshot of the youngsters, failing to meet appointments, and frequent after-hour phone calls to the student. Lily's response is seen below.

Communicating

Lily clarified what was said with paraphrase and perception checking. When Fiona asked:

> What do you do when what your are asked goes against your philosphy?

Lily responded:

> If your were me, what would you like me to say?

Fiona offered no words or suggestions. Lily recommended that Fiona share her perceptions with the associate. Fiona rebuffed this idea. Lily concluded with:

> We will try and make some careful comments to the asssociate. You try it over the next three days then make your decision.

Later, Lily obliquely discussed Fiona's perceptions with Fiona's associate teacher and the other two associates:

> The student and you may have differences between you. They need to fit into your programme but we also need to offer them flexibility to develop their own approaches.

That evening Fiona called Lily complaining of being asked to do too much. Again Lily suggested that Fiona contact the associate teacher directly. During the next few days the liaison lecturer sought additional information about the situation from university colleagues, the teaching associate, the school principal and the student. No university staff had positive or negative opinions of Fiona; the teacher felt tension, and had not had recent supervision experience; the principal was ill and unavailable; and Fiona asked to have a fresh start. Ultimately, Lily got all parties to agree that a change of placement was the best solution to the problem.

Nature of discussion with associate teachers

Lily listened, responded, informed and solved problems with the associate teachers. In the early part of each meeting Lily listened as the associates asked questions, provided school context, identified student teacher attributes and gave programme improvement suggestions. Next she gave encouragement, and responded to their questions and suggestions. Then she used most of her time with them informing them about university tasks, opportunities, challenges, and logistical reminders. A small amount of her time with them was used in probing and sorting out student teacher difficulties.

Advising student teachers about selecting associate teachers: An appreciated role of the Liaison Lecturer

In contrast to university staff matching students to associate teachers, I discovered during an informal discussion with students and associate teachers that student teachers selected their own associate teachers.

> *Student:* Some of us actually go up to the university and talk to the staff. You put in your own philosophy, who we fit in with. I did that even before I wrote down my choices. I thought who would I be good with.
>
> *Researcher:* You were looking for a match?

> Definitely, And I would advise any new student to do that. Lily our Liaison generally knows who is out there and how you would match especially with these schools. They deal with the School of Education all the time.
>
> *Associate Teacher:* The Liaison lecturers are just a phone call away if you do have a problem.
>
> *Student:* I think its a shame that the Lily doesn't come back. It's nice to have her check up on how you are doing. Even if its only to say you are doing well. Especially for those who don't have much contact with the university.

It appears that the Liaison lecturer is appreciated by students and associate teachers.

ASSOCIATE/STUDENT TEACHER DISCUSSIONS

Five discussions between associate and student teachers were observed and recorded. Two discussions representing self and clinical supervisory approaches are reported here. Emily, an associate teacher, encouraged self-directed, enabling student teacher supervision ,saying:

> What would you like to ask us about?
>
> It doesn't matter what you do. If it goes wonderfully well, we'll keep it. If not, we'll change it back.

This choice was possible because her classroom context was stable with no exceptionally demanding pupils, Emily was comfortable in empowering the student teacher, and Connie, the confident student teacher, had clear goals (effective management, clear directions, meeting individual needs) and beliefs about teaching. For example, she led her pupils in a musical hoops activity with cooperation rather than competition as her value objective. She encouraged pupils to help each other find room in the ever diminishing number of hula hoops set on the ground. Connie believed that children should learn to support rather than eliminate each other in the game.

Self-supervision

Rather than taking data about the student teacher's lesson, Emily invited Connie to present her own teaching self-analysis. Then Connie selected one problem that arose from the lesson and invited each of us to propose alternative solutions. We acted as human resources rather than as critics of performance.

Topics Discussed

Later, we examined a lesson critique prepared for an earlier lesson. Emily identified fourteen things that Connie had done right including giving clear instructions, involving all children, and creating effective student groupings. Then Connie took the conversational lead explaining her approach to teaching practice: "Your values and your confidence determine what sort of things you'll tackle." The discussion ended with Emily detailing her approach to supervision and explaining the context of her classroom within the school.

Clinical Supervision

Hanna, another associate teacher, used the pre-conference, observation, post-conference, clinical supervision sequence. This approach was probably chosen because the classroom context was demanding with an attention deficit boy exhibiting frequent off-task behavior. His actions, such as rolling a stool over other children's feet, created cascading management problems among the other pupils. Una, the student teacher, uncertain in this setting, wanted her associate teacher to provide management strategies and to set teaching goals.

Topics Discussed

Hanna wrote two lesson critiques following classroom observations. As Una ignored student off-task student behavior in two lessons, it appeared that she could not decide on appropriate actions to take. Hanna provided ample data to stimulate student teacher self-analysis. When Una continued to be uncertain about possible actions, Hanna provided practical tips and asked questions to promote decision-making.

Hanna also made frequent references to "things right". These included nine positive management moves such as setting private guidelines for the demanding boy, and using unobtrusive actions, as well as giving clear directions and gaining student involvement. She also gave practical tips. Items in this category were evenly divided between suggestions for classroom management and strategies for reading groups. Hanna also identified five "things wrong". Again these mostly focused on management concerns such as being aware of the off-task actions of children sitting on the edges of a group.

Both associate teachers offered encouragement but they differed in the nature of their discussions owing to the context of the classrooms and the confidence level of the student teachers. Neither of the associate teachers made reference to educational theories discussed in university course work. This finding supports British and Canadian research reporting associate teacher neglect in verbalising theory to practice connections (Smith, 1996).

In conversations with me after the conferences, the student teachers expressed positive personal feelings about the associate teachers:

> In conferences I feel I had the ownership of what was happening.
> She's super and very supportive.
> She's willing to share things and says I'll copy this for you.

EVALUATIVE LECTURER/STUDENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

The conferences of two evaluative lecturers were observed and tape recorded in two different schools. May, who appeared to have a collegial approach, supervised three student teachers. She made inquiries but also shared her own experience and gave direct advice. The other inquiry oriented lecturer, Inga, asked a series of probing questions until the two student teachers made connections to course work or text book references

Supervisory Approach

Both evaluators met briefly with principals and liaison teachers before devoting most of their time to student teachers. They reviewed the students' observation and planning folders, identified the students' teaching practice goals derived from the previous field experience, observed the student teacher's lessons, conducted a post-observation conference, and helped the students set teaching targets for the next conference. During the conference the evaluators invited student teacher self-evaluation and responded to concerns. Then they discussed university expectations and items from their observation notes. They differed in the relationships they created with the student teachers. May, a nurturing university evaluator, developed close collegial relationships, whereas Inga, the second evaluator, demonstrated a business-like, professional inquiry connection.

Topics Discussed

May most frequently identified that the student was doing "things right" such as having a caring manner, using effective small group planning, managing order, and presenting with an expressive voice. She frequently gave practical tips based on her own teaching experience including managing difficult students, how to progressively develop reading groups, and methods of involving parents in classrooms.

May challenged her student teachers to evaluate themselves, consider curriculum sequence, build class teamwork and to take time from direct teaching to observe pupils rather then only following "heads down, tails up" teacher action. She linked university course work to practice focusing on theoretical issues such as constructivistic notions of pupil empowerment. She highlighted Vygotsky's notions:

> Little ones might hear the 'g' in orange. Your know they hear something. You fill in the gaps. They give a bit, you give a bit. That's scaffolding the writing.

May's approach was collegial. In each conference she asked questions about the student-teacher's concerns, the classroom and school context such as the behavior of an attention seeking boy and the use of a teacher aide for a girl with Spinal Bifida. She also shared her report writing with the students:

> I've just written, 'Manages difficult child with respèct'.

The three student teachers responded positively to her collegiality. They left a note at her office describing their pleasure in having her as their university evaluator.

They shared their teaching expertise with her regarding mind mapping and pupil-to-pupil discussion. One student summed up her feeling about the evaluative lecturer," She makes an intimate connection with us."

Inga, the other evaluator, most frequently challenged her students to justify actions. She also discussed things right, theoretical issues and practical tips. She probed the student-teachers' instructional decisions, made them evaluate best choices, and challenged them to declare future goals. She asked them to describe "teaching purpose, and alternative actions". She identified their successes in classroom management and in developing pupil independence. She persisted in prompting them to make links from experience to the theoretical issues covered in university work in reading:

> What's your idea of guided reading?
>
> Good question. I'm probably confused. It's group reading with stopping to check for meaning.
>
> What kind of questions are you asking? - and,
> Why are you using them?
>
> Getting them to tell the story.
>
> What kind of questions, what were they essentially?
>
> Comprehension.
>
> If the class next door has circle reading, how do you think that teacher sees guided reading?
>
> Everyone in turn has to read out loud. It's like a pressure thing. The children have to be good at reading out loud.
>
> So what's the difference between you and that teacher who is getting circle reading?
>
> Process, I suppose. Reading to understand. She has a different purpose.
>
> If you go back to your reading text book it probably gives you some more ideas.

Her manner was objective. She mostly modelled from general principles rather than personal experience, probing and pushing the student teachers to find their own answers.

However, when student teachers failed to answer, she also provided practical tips for dealing with cross-cultural students, toilet parades, and parental expectations.

In post conference conversations, each set of student teachers stated that their evaluative lecturer's supervisory approach developed their professional growth.

STUDENT TEACHERS' RATINGS OF THE FREQUENCY OF THEMES DISCUSSED BY THEIR THREE SUPERVISORS AND THEMSELVES

In contrast to the observation and conference recording data, the survey findings are based on the ratings of five student teachers. According to student teachers' ratings, practical tips were most frequently (90%) discussed by all of their supervisors including the liaison lecturer, associate teachers, evaluative lecturers and themselves. Theoretical issues and things wrong were discussed the least by all supervisors and themselves.

Reinforcing the role description of a non-evaluator, the liaison lecturer rarely or never discussed assessment, things right, or things wrong. But, she was perceived frequently to practice counselling.

Associate teachers earned a 100% rating for providing encouragement and high ratings for providing practical tips, counselling, and for identifying things right.

Similarly, evaluative lecturers received 100% ratings for practical tips and a 96% for intellectual challenge. They also identified things wrong 80% of the time which is more than the 48% things wrong rating for associate teachers. This finding may indicate that associate teachers are less inclined to give negative critique or it may be that the students did not equate things wrong with the phrase "needs improvement" found in their final evaluation form completed by the associate teachers.

In student teachers' self-ratings they provided intellectual challenge to themselves 84% and self-evaluation 80% of the time. These student teachers appear to be practicing reflective practice (Schon, 1990). Except for lack of observation evidence of student teachers giving themselves practical tips all other student teachers' ratings were supported in conference data.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

What is the nature of supervisory roles as revealed by observation, survey, and talk in supervisory conferences?

Three characteristics of this approach to student teacher supervision arise from the data. First, all members of the supervisory team duplicate parts of each other's roles. For example, all three supervisors provide practical tips, encouragement and counselling. These overlapped aspects sustain the supporting role each supervisor has with the student teacher. Some supervisory tasks are common to all.

Second, while there is an overlapping of common supervisory tasks, particular aspects receive more emphasis from the different members of the

supervisory team. Examples from each of the supervisory roles demonstrate this. The liaison lecturer sorted out and followed through student-teacher problems thus relieving the evaluative lecturer of a stress-producing, time-consuming task. The liaison lecturer's advocacy is accepted by the student teachers because she is not evaluating them as well. She also took time to advise student teachers about associate teachers and listen to principals who needed to discuss ideas with objective outsiders.

The associate teachers provided lesson critiques on a continuing basis or gave the student teachers opportunities to be self-supervising. They used their knowledge of pupils, curriculum, and contexts of their classroom, school and community to help student teachers analyse their teaching.

The evaluative lecturers highlighted assessment, intellectual challenge and theoretical issues from a wide angle. They reviewed lesson critiques, completed classroom observations and challenged the student teachers to set goals, thus determining student teacher growth from past and present performance, as well as setting future expectations. They bridged university reading, learning, and classroom management theory to classroom practice because they had knowledge of and experience in teaching university course content. They were able to complete these tasks so thoroughly only because they had several hours to examine the progress of each student teacher.

Third, the unannounced self-supervision role of the student teachers emerged. This role was greatly encouraged by one associate teacher who empowered her student teacher to direct and monitor her own progress. Moreover, both evaluative lecturers invited student teacher self-supervision and the student teachers rated their own self-evaluation at a high level. Student teacher self-supervision should be included and encouraged as part of a team approach to supervision.

Differentiated supervisory roles were seen during observations, heard in conference dialogue, and identified in student teacher surveys. The roles, however, were not rigidly confining as both associate teachers and evaluative lecturers displayed a range of professional choices in supervising student teachers. Furthermore, the three supervisors complemented the work of each other and contributed to the student teacher development. The Waikato supervisory team model should be explored by other teacher educators investigating differentiated roles in teacher supervision.

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