What the teaching perspectives of cooperating teachers tell us about their advisory practices

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Abstract

This study drew upon the recently developed Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI) to compare and contrast the teaching perspectives of cooperating teachers against a range of demographic data specific to cooperating teachers. The outcomes indicate, among other things, that a high percentage of cooperating teachers base their pedagogical relationship with learners upon a Nurturing perspective, that a Social Reform perspective among cooperating teachers is almost non-existent, and that a Transmission perspective is more prominent at the secondary school level than at other school levels. Collectively, the insights from this study provide one of the most comprehensive surveys of a single cohort of cooperating teachers reported in the literature.

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1. Introduction

The practicum setting and the work of cooperating teachers have long been regarded by student teachers as the two most important elements of their professional programs in Education (Blakey, Everett-Turner, Massing, & Scott, 1988; Wideen, Holborn, & Desrosiers, 1987). Understanding the complexities of that learning environment, particularly what gives meaning and structure to the work of cooperating teachers as they engage in pedagogical relationships with student teachers, is essential for providing exemplary practicum settings. While much has been written for and about cooperating teachers—for example, Zimpher and Howey (1987) commend the attention directed at specific advisory approaches and training practices—there are repeated calls for more extensive research in this area (Knowles & Cole, 1996; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998; Zeichner, 1992).

While there has been a concerted effort to explore ‘training’ programs to facilitate the work...
of cooperating teachers (e.g., Glickman & Bey, 1990; Marvin & Beasley, 1996; Metcalf, 1991) and several publications on improving supervisory practices (e.g., Acheron & Gall, 1997; Marvin & Beasley, 1996, Wiles & Bondi, 1996), substantive consideration of cooperating teachers’ work contexts and the influence of their teaching perspectives on supervisory practices are conspicuous by their absence. These issues, first raised by Zeichner and Liston (1987) and recently taken up by Williams (1995) and Knowles and Cole (1996), are beginning to feature in arguments for research that seeks in-depth understandings of the pedagogical relationship constructed between cooperating teachers and student teachers. An important element in understanding how cooperating teachers construct pedagogical relationships with student teachers is understanding the teaching perspectives that guide their practice as educators. Exploring the teaching perspectives of cooperating teachers and the significance of these perspectives in their work with student teachers is the focus of this paper.

2. Teaching perspectives and supervisory practices

The beliefs, actions, motivations, and intentions in relation to the manner in which one conceives the context of learning is known as a teaching perspective (Pratt, 1998). Teaching perspectives give shape and meaning to educational practices including supervisory practices. The way in which we plan instruction, the manner in which we engage students, the elicitation strategies we employ, our consideration of the social milieu in which learning takes place, the assessment strategies we draw upon, etc., reveal our understanding of what constitutes knowledge, and our sense of the relationship between the knower and the known. Therefore, teaching perspectives are important in any exploration of pedagogical practices that cooperating teachers employ in their interactions with student teachers.

Many researchers have attempted to conceptually define and empirically document perspectives on teaching (Chan, 1994; Feiman-Nemser, 1990; Stofflelt & Stoddart, 1994). Their efforts have resulted in considerable agreement between and among the various attributes. For this study we chose the work of Pratt and Collins (1992) and Pratt (1998) who drew heavily on this intellectual heritage in developing a contemporary and easily self-administered instrument called the Teaching Perspectives Inventory (TPI). This inventory has special appeal because of its broad applicability to a range of education contexts. Further, we believe that its use in this study and the types of results it generates are beneficial for readers who are seeking ways to develop more comprehensive understandings of cooperating teachers with whom they work. A quick appreciation of the inventory can be gained by taking it online at ‘www.teachingperspectives.com.’ Finally, we believe that the TPI provides a more substantive rendering of supervisory practices than some earlier instruments, for example the directive, collaborative, and non-collaborative classifications provided by Glickman’s Supervisory Belief Index (Glickman, 1985).

The TPI differentiates between five perspectives on teaching: Transmission, Developmental, Apprenticeship, Nurturing, and Social Reform. The development and use of the TPI has undergone rigorous testing with a wide range of practitioners, educators, and student teachers (Pratt, Collins, & Jarvis-Selinger, 2001b). Pratt (1998) articulate each perspective from a normative frame, allowing the reader to appreciate the strengths of good teaching practice that is represented within each perspective. This rendering allows sufficient distinction between the perspectives and avoids an overly atomistic or excessively expansive representation of each.

It is important not to confuse teaching perspectives with teaching styles or teaching techniques. Teaching perspectives encompass more than a repertoire of behaviours and teaching actions (Pratt & Collins, 2000). Each perspective incorporates fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning, instructional intentions within teaching contexts, and actions in situ (Jarvis, 2002). No perspective is either good or bad, and excellent or poor forms of teaching can occur regardless of the perspective(s) that shape one’s practice (Pratt, Arseneau, & Collins, 2001a).
For instance, good teaching from a Transmission perspective is directly associated with content or subject matter expertise. According to this perspective, an educator’s primary responsibility is to present the content accurately and efficiently and “[g]ood teachers take learners systematically through a set of tasks that lead to mastery of the content. They are clear and enthusiastic about their content and convey that enthusiasm to their students” (Pratt et al., 2001a,b, p. 4). Within this perspective, it is the learners’ responsibility to learn that content in its authorized forms.

The Developmental perspective emphasizes that “good teaching must be planned and conducted from the learner’s point of view [and teachers must] therefore understand how their learners think and reason about the content” (Pratt et al., 2001a,b, p. 4). An important dimension of this perspective is anchoring new knowledge to a learner’s prior knowledge. Therefore, from this perspective, good teachers are alert and flexible to the exploration of a learner’s existing understandings as they seek ways of bringing about new understandings.

The Apprenticeship perspective starts with the assumption that learning is facilitated when students “work on authentic tasks in real settings of application or practice…where both teaching and learning are rooted in the doing of work, not just in talking about it” (Pratt et al., 2001a,b, p. 6). In some academic contexts, apprenticeship perspectives have been shunned because the supposed lack of intellectual engagement such approaches require of the part of the learner—where the learner duplicates another’s practice rather than constructing their own practice (Zeichner & Liston, 1990; Wells & Claxton, 2002). In defence of such characterizations, Schön (1987) argues that imitation is a creative act, where the ‘master’ models both the practice and the intellectual processes that underlie the practice, and that the reconstruction of that practice by the ‘apprentice’ requires sophisticated intellectual work on the part of the learner. Nonetheless, the emphasis in the apprenticeship perspective, as captured by Pratt et al. (2001a,b), remains solidly connected to the action setting and the activity itself.

In contrast, educators that exemplify a Nurturing perspective believe that learning has a significant emotional component; both the head and the heart need to be engaged for good teaching to occur (Noddings, 1984). From this perspective, good teachers “care about their students, promote a climate of caring and trust, help people set challenging but achievable goals, and support learners’ efforts as well as their achievements” (Pratt et al., 2001a,b, p. 8).

Finally, from a Social Reform perspective educators awaken students to “values and ideologies that lie hidden in texts and common practices [and] challenge the status quo to encourage students to consider the ways in which they and their [students] are positioned and constructed within particular discourses” (Pratt et al., 2001a,b, p. 11). This perspective borrows from critical theorists such as Carr and Kemmis (1983) who, among others, argue that educational practices should be examined to determine whose interests are being served and for what purposes. In short, educators with a social reform perspective emphasize that the practice of teaching is inherently political and any discussion of teaching should not be isolated from the social milieu in which it occurs.

In sum, it is likely that all five perspectives may be evident in the beliefs, understandings, motivations, and practices of cooperating teachers. However, Pratt et al. (2001a,b) have demonstrated that often one or two perspectives are usually more dominant for individual teachers across a range of pedagogical contexts and, as such, the TPI provides insight into the ways in which the teachers view knowledge and the sense they make of the relationship between the knower and the known. Such insights are particularly important if faculties of education are to provide professional development opportunities that are responsive to and respectful of the perspectives that cooperating teachers draw upon as they construct and reflect upon their advisory practices.

3. Research method

Each year the University of British Columbia’s (UBC) Teacher Education Office draws upon
approximately 1300 classroom teachers to provide practicum placements for its 1000 student teachers (the difference between the two numbers is because many secondary student teachers have more than one cooperating teacher). The practicum constitutes one third of UBC’s Bachelor of Education program. Student teachers spend approximately 16 weeks in schools (4-day orientation, 2-week introductory, and 13-week extended practica).

The study reported here represents the second phase of a two-part project entitled the ‘Voice of School Advisors’ (VOSA). The aim of the VOSA project is to develop a more comprehensive profile of cooperating teachers than currently exists (e.g., RATE IV, 1990). In the first phase, VOSA I, a general survey was distributed to the 1999–2000 cohort of UBC cooperating teachers to elicit their backgrounds and beliefs about supervision. A numbered double-blind envelope system was used to ensure anonymity and track survey returns. The return rate for the survey was 61% (778 cooperating teachers) and was representative of the overall cooperating teacher population in terms of geographical distribution, gender, school level, and age. In the second phase, VOSA II, conducted 18 months later, the TPI was distributed to those who returned the VOSA I survey. We did not survey the entire cooperating teacher cohort again because we felt that the teachers who did not respond to VOSA I were unlikely to respond to VOSA II. The return rate for VOSA II was 39% (301 cooperating teachers). The VOSA II return rate was effected by the movement of teachers to and from schools which were difficult to track, and resignations or retirements by teachers from the profession between the mailing of VOSA I and VOSA II. Therefore, not all VOSA II surveys reached the VOSA I respondents resulting in a reduced number of responses to the TPI. Also, the VOSA II survey arrived in schools during a period of industrial unrest in schools, which adversely affected the return rate. However, the VOSA II survey returns were both sufficient in number \( n = 301 \) and representative of the 1999–2000 cooperating teacher cohort (in terms of geographical distribution, gender, school level, and age) to ensure that the outcomes are valid and reliable.

The VOSA II survey, because of the way in which it was packaged and presented to cooperating teachers, was clearly intended to seek the teaching perspectives they drew upon in their relationship with student teachers. However, as the individual TPI items do not specifically use the words ‘cooperating teacher’ or ‘student teacher,’ but rather ‘teacher’ and ‘learner,’ we believe the VOSA II rendering of cooperating teachers’ teaching perspectives is more encompassing and representative of the ways they think and act in pedagogical contexts and potentially avoids guarded or wary responses that might arise from those teachers who worry about providing the ‘correct’ answers to ensure continued involvement in student teacher practica.

In order to compare teaching perspectives among cooperating teachers, the first level of analysis was to calculate each respondent’s dominant perspective(s). This was accomplished by calculating the raw scores for each perspective (which can range from 9 to 45 points) and then comparing the means of each perspective score to determine perspective dominance. A perspective is considered dominant if its score is one or more standard deviations above the means across the five perspective for each person. Therefore, dominance is calculated ‘within participant’ rather than ‘between participants’ (Jarvis, 2002). Or stated another way, dominance is calculated relative to how a person answers each item on the TPI rather than comparing it to an absolute group value. To compare and contrast the VOSA I and VOSA II data, we conducted a series of univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). As suggested by Huberty and Morris (1989), a series of multiple ANOVAs rather than a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) is appropriate when the variables one is examining are conceptually distinct, as in the case of teaching perspectives as measured by the TPI.

One of the limitations of VOSA II is that we were documenting cooperating teachers’ espoused perspectives, not their perspectives-in-action. As Argyris, Putnam, and McLain Smith (1985) warn, what people say when given the time to think about a response might well be at variance with what they actually do in the immediacy of the
action setting. Another limitation is that the cooperating teachers who returned the surveys were, to some extent, a self-selected population because they chose voluntarily to complete and return the survey. A third limitation, which is characteristic of survey instruments, is their tendency to shed a little light on many issues but insufficient illumination to allow a detailed examination of key themes—explanations of which would require further follow-up study. Any reading of the results reported below should be tempered by the knowledge of these limitations. However, given these constraints, this study provides one of the most comprehensive surveys of a single cohort of cooperating teachers reported in the literature.

### 4. Research results

Our analysis is presented in five sections. The first section draws upon a whole-group analysis and reveals, among other things, the prominence of the Nurturing perspective among cooperating teachers. This examination provides a backdrop for sections two to five that explore the relationship between the initial profile that was developed from VOSA I (Clarke, 2003) and the TPI data. While there were many interesting features of the analysis that caught our attention, we focus solely on those areas for which statistical significance was attained ($\alpha \leq 0.5$). Results are reported in percentages within groups to ensure that any comparison reflects the number of respondents in each group and not percentages of the total number of cooperating teachers for the whole study.

#### 4.1. Prominence of the nurturing perspective

Of the 301 respondents, 232 had a singularly dominant perspective, 42 had a combination of two dominant perspectives, and 27 had no dominant perspective. For those who held a singularly dominant perspective the breakdown among the five perspectives in descending order is:

- 156 Nurturing,
- 31 Apprenticeship,
- 27 Transmission,
- 16 Developmental, and
- 2 Social Reform

The analysis illustrates that 52% of the VOSA II respondents were comprised of teachers for whom Nurturing is their single dominant perspective. This rises to 64% if we include teachers with a combination of two dominant perspectives of which Nurturing is one. Teachers with Apprenticeship or Transmission as their single dominant perspective account for 10.2% and 9%, respectively, of the survey population. This rises to 18.2% and 11.3%, respectively, if we include teachers with a combination of two dominant perspectives of which Apprenticeship or Transmission, respectively, is one. The Developmental perspective accounts for 5.3% of teachers who had a single dominant perspective. This increases to 11% if we include those with a combination of two dominant perspectives of which Developmental is one. Those for whom Social Reform was their single dominant perspective comprise only 0.6% of the population. This percentage rises to 1% when we include those with a combination of two dominant perspectives of which Social Reform is one.

The prevalence of the Nurturing perspective among cooperating teachers speaks to an interesting dynamic within the cooperating teacher population. Clearly, many cooperating teachers (64%) see the ethic of care (Noddings, 1984) as central to teaching and learning. The adoption of this perspective in their pedagogical interaction with student teachers augurs well for those who argue that the relationship between teacher and student is one of the most critical elements of the practicum environment. Given the intensely personal nature of the cooperating teacher and student teacher relationship this finding is particularly important. If nothing else, an environment of trust and care that a Nurturing perspective provides increases the possibility that feedback is both accepted willingly and actively sought out by the student. Without these conditions, openness and inquisitiveness can be quickly replaced by student defensiveness and deflection, two attributes which negate the very purpose of the
cooperating teacher and student teacher relationship. Further, a climate of care and trust will encourage students to entertain uncertainty, express confusion, and articulate doubt, all of which are precursors to framing and reframing, or reflecting on, one’s practice (Schön, 1987).

Apprenticeship and Transmission perspectives, hovering around 15% of the cooperating population provide an interesting commentary on a possible shift in recent years with respect to these two perspectives in teacher education. For example, in the 1980s concerns were expressed that the relationship between students and cooperating teachers was dominated by an apprenticeship approach (Boydell, 1986; Zeichner & Liston, 1987) where activities for student teachers are carefully prescribed in advance allowing little discretion on the part of the student during either the design or implementation phases during their practica (Kilbourn, 1982; Zeichner, Liston, Mahllos & Gomez, 1987). Further, Shulman (1986a) and Tabachnick, Popkewitz, and Zeichner (1979) lamented the fact that teacher education had become imbued with a technical, almost scientific, disciplinary language that was supposedly an accurate representation of classroom practice. The results from this study suggest that far fewer cooperating teachers within the 1999–2000 cohort seem to be drawn towards similar elements in the Apprenticeship and Transmission perspectives than formerly suggested in the literature.

Another surprising result is the very low percentages of cooperating teachers for whom the Developmental or Social Reform perspectives were dominant. Among other groups of educators who have taken the TPI, these two perspectives, while always lower than the other three, have never registered at such low levels. Unfortunately, the number of teachers within these categories is insufficient to shed much light or allow further interpretation. However, of the two results, the Social Reform result is particularly alarming for those who see teaching and teacher education as a vehicle for social change. This is especially true for teacher educators who conceptualize their programs around social reform or social justice perspectives, and look to cooperating teachers to model the very practices that they would like to witness in their student teachers’ practices. This raises interesting questions for a follow-up study: How do university teacher educators’ teaching perspectives compare with their school-based cooperating teacher counterparts? and How does the potential difference between the two impact on the students’ teacher education program?

A cautionary note is in order here with respect to the dangers associated with teachers adopting any single perspective to the exclusion of all other perspectives. While we commend the vast number of teachers for whom care and trust clearly form the basis of the learning environment they provide, holding rigidly to that perspective in all situations is inadvisable and potentially detrimental to student teacher learning. There will be occasions when cooperating teachers need to draw upon elements of other perspectives, for example, with a particularly self-centered learner, and a where blended approach exhibiting both care and trust but strong direction and specific instruction is necessary.

4.2. Sex

There were 183 female and 118 male participants who responded to VOSA II. The analysis of TPI data revealed three statistically significant results between the teaching perspective held by men and women. In the order that the perspectives appear in Fig. 1, first, men were three times more likely than women to hold a Transmission perspective among those for whom Transmission was their single dominant perspective (Fig. 1). Second, women were twice as likely as men to hold an Apprenticeship perspective among those for whom Apprenticeship was their single dominant perspective. And third, women were twice as likely as men to hold a Nurturing perspective among those for whom Nurturing was their single dominant perspective.

These results indicate that despite the distribution of the teaching perspectives across the cooperating teacher population as a whole (as determined in section one of the analysis), the differences between women and men outlined in the three instances above cannot be accounted by the normal variation that exists within the
categories. Therefore, the result that the Transmission perspective is disproportionately held by men, from among the group of teachers who hold this as a dominant perspective, suggests that the assumptions that underlie this perspective hold a particular attraction for males more so than females. When we consider this attraction—taking learners systematically through a set of tasks that lead to mastery of content—this approach to teacher education bears closer scrutiny beyond just the attraction of this perspective for males.

The reader will recall that the Transmission approach is directly associated with subject matter expertise. Given this association, two important questions about subject matter expertise in teacher education arise: Is teacher education a mature field of study in its own right? And, is there an authoritative body of knowledge upon which cooperating teachers can draw upon as they teach beginning teachers how to teach? In the first instance, it has been argued that teacher education is only now approaching the point at which one might consider that a coherence in the field is beginning to emerge such that maturity might be claimed (Clarke, 2001; Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996). In the second instance, the concept of a body of knowledge that might constitute a curriculum for teacher education continues to be hotly debated (Donmoyer, 1996; Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1996). Therefore, those who adopt a Transmission perspective in their work with student teachers face significant challenges. In the absence of a broadly accepted knowledge base upon which to draw, there is the danger that these teachers assume that their personal beliefs about teaching and learning constitute the disciplinary knowledge for the profession. Such assumptions are likely to reify idiosyncratic practices without the necessary scrutiny that, say, reflection on practice and peer debate within the profession might afford. Therefore, it is among the male cooperating teachers that particular professional development efforts might need to be directed to ensure, at the very least, that recent arguments with respect to a knowledge base for teaching is problematized.

The significant difference that emerged for women in drawing upon an Apprenticeship
perspective in their work with cooperating teachers is at odds with societal notions of apprenticeship and apprenticeship training—typically regarded as male in orientation and composition (Fuller & Unwin, 1998). Although the reasons for this VOSA II result are unclear, the finding is quite instructive. The difference in favour of women surprised us and provides a useful reminder to the dangers of gendered expectations with regard to the teaching perspectives. Furthermore, the proportion of cooperating teachers for whom this perspective guides their practice is not trivial, rising to 18% when single and dual dominance is combined. Therefore, it is incumbent upon teacher educators to recognize the prevalence of this perspective—with its emphasis on skill and expertise—somewhat unexpectedly among women.

The third finding, that women are twice as likely to adopt a nurturing perspective, is consistent with the literature on the feminization of teaching (Bradley, 1989) that has occurred in recent decades and where “women were said to be more nurturant than men and therefore viewed as especially suitable for [teaching]” (Johnson, 1989, p. 241).

This finding was anticipated but nonetheless the caution associated with the adoption of any one perspective to the exclusion of others still remains.

4.3. School level

Of the participants who completed the TPI, 117 taught in an elementary school, 13 at a junior high, and 171 taught at a secondary school. Five significant results emerged from the TPI data. First, cooperating teachers who held a singularly dominant Transmission perspective were all secondary school teachers (Fig. 2).

Second, the majority of those who had Apprenticeship as their dominant perspective were also from secondary schools. Third, secondary school teachers constituted almost all of those for whom the Developmental perspective was dominant. Fourth, teachers for whom Nurturing was their dominant perspective were twice as likely to come from elementary schools than secondary schools. And finally, respondents who had a combination of two dominant perspectives were likely to be secondary school teachers. Again, we are reminded

![Fig. 2. School level differences by mean TPI scores.](image-url)
that these findings are significant in that they occur with a frequency greater than would normally be expected within these categories given the distribution of the perspectives across the survey population as outlined in section one of the analysis.

As content matter is at the forefront of the secondary school curriculum, it is not surprising that the appeal of the authoritative nature of disciplinary knowledge is embraced at the secondary level. This is evident in the Transmission perspective held by secondary school teachers more so than their junior high and elementary school counterparts where there is a deliberate attempt to slip the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge in favour of a more interdisciplinary approach to learning. Given that secondary school teachers comprise the entire category of those for whom Transmission is the dominant perspective—taking learners systematically through a set of tasks that lead to mastery of a content—we repeat our earlier warning regarding the ongoing dispute about the status of disciplinary knowledge in teacher education and the need to explore the potential contribution of other perspectives in learning to teach.

The second and third findings, while highlighting smaller differences between school level nonetheless point to an almost monopoly by secondary school teachers over Transmission, Apprenticeship, and Developmental perspectives. The near absence of these perspectives among the junior high and elementary populations is a curious phenomenon and not one that we expected. Therefore, the richness of conversation among cooperating teachers as they compare and contrast their ways of working with student teachers afforded by the presence of colleagues whose views represent a variety of perspectives is lost in these settings and they maybe poorer for it. We suggest that professional development efforts, particularly at the junior high and elementary levels deliberately present multiple perspectives to ensure, at the very least, a vigorous and stimulating debate about differing perspectives that one might employ as a teacher educator. Such a presentation at least provides an opportunity to name, problematize, compare and contrast one’s own perspectives, which otherwise might remain tacit and unchallenged.

The finding that teachers for whom Nurturing is their dominant perspective are twice as likely to come from an elementary school setting is in keeping with the family orientation and pastoral care structure of elementary schools, a philosophy that appears to lend itself to the endorsement of a Nurturing perspective among teachers at that level. Nonetheless, this brings us back to an earlier point with respect to Nurturing, and its importance in providing an environment of trust and care in which beginning teachers feels comfortable in taking risks and sharing doubts with cooperating teacher without worrying excessively that such expressions might signal incompetence or a lack of knowledge on the student teachers’ part. It is reassuring to note that Nurturing perspective, although more commonly found in the elementary school settings is represented by across all school levels among cooperating teachers.

The final finding in this section, the predominance of secondary school teachers among those who have two dominant perspectives, reinforces the earlier notion of multiple perspectives abounding at that level in contrast to a distinct lack of diversity at other levels. Again, the advice would be to encourage a broadly based discussion with cooperating teachers particularly at the junior high and elementary levels, that highlights the potential of various perspectives.

4.4. Academic qualifications

VOSA I results demonstrated that cooperating teachers are almost twice as likely to have obtained a graduate degree than their non-cooperating teacher counterparts. This result was reflected in the VOSA II returns where 25% had a graduate degree. The analysis of the teaching perspectives data in relation to the academic qualifications data revealed two statistically significant findings. First, those who hold an Apprenticeship perspective as their single dominant perspective are more likely to hold an undergraduate degree than would be expected given the distribution of undergraduate and graduate degrees for the cooperating teacher population (Fig. 3).
Second, those who hold a Nurturing perspective as their single dominant perspective are also more likely to hold an undergraduate degree than an advanced degree given the distribution of undergraduate and graduate degrees for the cooperating teacher population. On the surface, it is difficult to conclude anything other than cooperating teachers with Apprenticeship and Nurturing as their single dominant perspectives are less likely to pursue graduate studies than their cooperating teacher counterparts.

However, this information takes on a slightly different meaning when coupled with an earlier VOSA I finding that cooperating teachers with undergraduate degrees are less likely to have failed a student than those with an advanced degree (22% versus 30%, respectively). The supervisory challenges associated with border-line ‘Pass’ student teachers are well documented (Knowles & Cole, 1996; Glickman & Bey, 1990) and in the face of such challenges it is often easier for supervisors to just ‘Pass’ these students. Therefore, teacher educators need to be particularly alert to situations involving border-line ‘Pass’ student teachers where these situations are combined with cooperating teachers who: (1) have not had the intellectual or educational advantage afforded by graduate studies, and (2) seem to rely exclusively on an Apprenticeship or Nurturing perspective. This caution is predicated, in part, on the assumption that an advanced degree equips cooperating teachers with a greater capacity to reflect upon and evaluate the abilities of border-line ‘Pass’ students; an assumption that would need to be verified with further research. Nonetheless, the VOSA II findings outlined above provide sufficient reason to monitor such circumstances more closely than might be the ordinarily the case.

### 4.5. Years of teaching

The final statistically significant result from VOSA II is based on the number of years of teaching experience for cooperating teachers.
Years of teaching experience were grouped into five-year intervals, resulting in groups that ranged from 39 to 69 participants. The one significant result to emerge was that teachers for whom Transmission was their single dominant perspective were more likely to be experienced teachers than other teachers in that category (Fig. 4).

This result is not surprising as the field of teacher education has undergone considerable change in the past 50 years (Clarke, 2001; Zeichner, 1998) and these changes are reflected in programs of studies for beginning teachers. One result is a reduced pursuit of content knowledge per se in teacher education programs that would guide student teachers through a set of tasks leading to mastery (a Transmissive perspective)—an approach that was evident in the 1970s and 1980s—to a consideration of different ways of conceiving of knowledge, for example, a sociocultural perspective (Wertsch, 1991), that are more prevalent in programs today.

Therefore, it is not surprising that those with a greater number of years of teaching experience, and for whom their teacher education programs were based upon research from the teacher effectiveness, process-product, and teacher competency paradigms of the 1970s and 1980s (Boydell, 1986; Shulman, 1986a), might still view teaching as primarily instrumental problem solving made rigorous by the application of scientific theory. If this view guides one’s advisory practice, then student teachers are seen as technicians who faithfully implement a predetermined set of tasks leading to mastery in the profession (Zeichner & Liston, 1987). The result reported above suggests that particular attention needs to be given to older cooperating teachers as many seem to have a preference for a Transmissive perspective in their pedagogical practices.

5. Conclusion

This study is based on an assumption that the Teaching Perspective Inventory renders an overall sense of a particular perspective, or set of
perspectives, that teachers draw upon in their relationship with students; in this instance the teacher educator relationship that develops between a cooperating teacher and a student teacher. In this study we used the TPI to extend current understandings of cooperating teachers that exist in the literature. Earlier attempts to develop similar profiles are based on large-scale demographic data or small-scale in-depth studies. Our research is distinctive in that we sought to combine the strengths of both approaches: a large scale-study that went beyond demographic data to offer more substantive insights into the pedagogical relationship between teacher and student. In our concluding remarks we focus on five key outcomes and their implications for teacher education.

One of the most important results from the study is the prevalence of the Nurturing perspective among our cooperating teacher population. We have written at length in the paper about the importance of this perspective in allowing student teachers to entertain uncertainty as they explore what it means to teach. Further, we are heartened by this result because of the intensely personal nature of the one-on-one pedagogical relationship between cooperating teachers and student teachers, and the critical role that trust and care play in discussing a student teacher’s suitability and success in the profession. These two qualities are even more important in a situation where a student teacher in trouble is encouraged to self-select out of the profession—an option that provides the most gracious exit for the student, and for which care and trust are essential if the decision is to be recognized as being in the best interest of all concerned. For these reasons the Nurturing perspective is a very important dimension of the professional practice of cooperating teachers and when combined with the results from this study it behooves all teacher educators to explore and discuss the elements that underlie this perspective with their cooperating teachers.

While the widespread use of the Nurturing perspective is encouraging, our celebration of this finding is tempered by the almost overwhelming singularity of this perspective at the junior high and elementary school levels in contrast to the more diverse perspectives found among cooperating teachers at the secondary school level. At issue here is the value of multiple perspectives in providing the potential for stimulating debate and discussion among cooperating teachers about various perspectives, appreciating the difference between these perspectives, and drawing upon elements of each in interactions with student teachers as the situation demands. A follow-up in-depth analysis of cooperating teacher practices in relation to the different teaching perspectives that they draw upon over the course of a practicum would be beneficial in confirming or alleviating this concern. However, the results of this study point to a dimension of supervisory practice that all jurisdictions might explore more closely, than would ordinarily be the case, to determine if a similar pattern exist.

Another important aspect that emerged from the TPI results surrounds the Social Reform perspective—a perspective that influential educators such as Ken Zeichner have promoted for many years within teacher education (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). We can only speculate on the reasons for the almost total absence of this perspective in our 1999–2000 cohort of cooperating teachers and wonder about the challenge that this absence presents for increasing attempts to include social reform and social justice issues within teacher education programs (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997). Unless there is some understanding of this perspective by cooperating teachers and, at minimum, an attempt at the school level to engage student teachers in these issues, then it is unlikely that on-campus efforts around social reform or justice issues will have much effect. This result recalls the general challenges faced by those engaged in change efforts (Fullan, 1993) but provides a very real and vivid instance that has immediate relevance to those involved in per-service teacher education programs.

The emergence of the Transmission perspective at a number of points in the analysis raises the issue of what is the knowledge about teaching that cooperating teachers expect their student teachers to master especially given the current debates surrounding the issue of a “knowledge base” for the profession. It would be interesting to return to Shulmanc’s earlier attempts to delineate different
forms of knowledge in teaching (Shulman, 1986b) and examine these in relation to what it is that cooperating teachers, who have a preference for the Transmission perspective, believe they are conveying to student teachers. Nonetheless, the emergence of the Transmission perspective in British Columbia’s cooperating teacher population is problematic in the highly complex and relational enterprise that constitutes ‘learning how to teach.’ As such, it serves as an important cautionary signal to all teacher educators to attend closely to the emergence of this perspective as being dominant among a significant portion of the population.

Finally, many trends within the analysis were anticipated; for example, the prevalence of the Transmission perspective among secondary school teachers as opposed to teachers at other school levels. However, the TPI was quite instructive in demonstrating some discrepancies between our intuitive sense of the pedagogical relationship between cooperating teachers and student teachers and the actual relationship; for example, the finding that women more so than men were likely to adopt an Apprenticeship perspective from among those for whom Apprenticeship was their single dominant perspective. If for no other reason than this, the results of this study are important in that they encourage us to scrutinize more closely the assumptions that underlie our conceptions of cooperating teachers and how they approach their work with student teachers, and provide clearer direction for designing professional development efforts (the substance of another paper!) that both enable and enhance their work as school-based teacher educators.

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References


Further Reading