The nature and substance of cooperating teacher reflection

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Abstract

The learning opportunities for student-teachers in practicum settings has long been acknowledged and studied in considerable depth. However, the learning opportunities for cooperating teachers, while celebrated and extolled as an important reciprocal benefit, have not been verified to the same degree. Drawing on the concept of reflection, and specifically the ways in which teachers reframe aspects of their advisory practice, this study follows the conversations of five teachers and their student-teachers during a 13-week practicum. Among the things that we learn from these teachers is that the oft-heard argument that “a teacher is a teacher is a teacher” is wrong-headed, that the biography and the cultural milieu that shape one’s advisory practices needs to be explicit, and that reflection is born of incidents but primarily thematic in nature.

Keywords: Cooperating teachers; Reflection; Practicum; Student teacher; Teacher education

1. Introduction

This paper is a companion piece to an earlier study that sought to identify the nature and substance of student-teacher reflection in practicum settings (Clarke, 1995). While that line of inquiry continues to occupy considerable research attention in the literature, the issue of cooperating teacher reflection in practicum settings has been largely ignored. Nonetheless, a common assumption is that practicum settings provide an excellent opportunity for cooperating teachers to reflect upon their advisory practices (Ganser, 1993; Davies, Brady, Rodger, & Wall, 1999; Wepner & Mobley, 1998). While observation, questionnaire, and interview data (Weasmer & Woods, 2003; Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002), along with self-report data (Johnson, 2003; Cheyne, 2002) support this contention, to date, substantive analyses of the ways in which cooperating teachers frame and reframe their advisory practices have not been forthcoming. The scarcity of such studies is understandable given the considerable time required for such an examination, the limited resources available to undertake this sort of inquiry, and the hectic work schedules of cooperating teachers.

Mindful of such constraints, the cooperating teachers in this study were provided with the opportunity to reflect on their advisory practices over the course of a 13-week student-teacher practicum by drawing on a modified stimulated-recall approach. The modified recall approach was particularly

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important in this study as it allowed the cooperating teachers, rather than the researcher, to set the agenda for their reflections, thus permitting a practitioner-led examination of advisory practices. Traditional stimulated-recall requires the participants to respond to an excerpt of video or audiotape selected by the researcher for its potential to stimulate conversation around issues deemed important by the researcher (Tuckwell, 1982). By contrast, the modified recall approach allowed the participants to view an entire tape and to stop and comment upon any issue that they regarded as relevant to their practice. Therefore, in this study, the cooperating teachers had the opportunity to frame and reframe (Schön, 1987) what was significant about their practice, providing an authentic account of the ways in which they reflected upon their work as school-based teacher educators.

2. Literature review

Most studies that seek to document the beliefs, understandings, and meanings that cooperating teachers bring to their relationship with student-teachers are studies on cooperating teachers rather than studies with or by cooperating teachers. These studies indicate that the role of the cooperating teacher is poorly defined (Applegate & Lasley, 1982; Cole & Sorrill, 1992; Griffin, 1983; Grimmet & Ratzlaff, 1986) and, at times, “ambiguous, diverse, and often overlapping or at odds” with the roles of other practicum participants (Knowles & Cole, 1996). Other authors note that a compounding factor is that cooperating teachers typically receive little or no preparation for their role and little or no recognition or support for their involvement; consequently, they rely heavily on their prior experiences as student-teachers themselves to guide their advisory practices (Knowles, & Cole, 1996) than adopting a more deliberative approach to their advisory role. As a result, researchers such as Guyton and McIntyre’s (1990) caution that often:

…conferences are dominated by cooperating teachers and student-teachers take on a passive role. Conferences involve low levels of thinking: descriptions and direction-giving interactions predominate. Analysis and reflection on teaching are not common; the substantive issues of conferences tend to focus on teaching techniques, classroom management, and pupil characteristics. Craft and experiential knowledge, and efficiency are rationales for most recommendations. (p. 525).

Other issues highlighted in the literature include the claim that field-based experiences appear to “undermine the theoretical work being done at the university because students are often assigned to teachers who do not question the wisdom of practice or model a variety of effective teaching strategies” (Hollingsworth, 1988). Further, when feedback is provided “it tends to be judgmental and expert in nature rather than reflective or analytical” (Browne, 1992, p. 31).

There is, however, some evidence that advisory practices may not be universally in the sad state of disarray indicated above. For example, contrary to Applegate and Lasley’s (1982) contention that “there seems to be a tacit assumption [by cooperating teachers] that preservice teachers learn best by doing” (p. 15), a number of studies suggest that cooperating teachers think about their advisory practices in more diverse and professionally rich ways. Grimmet and Ratzlaff (1986), in a ground-breaking and frequently cited study, explored “the expectations that teachers held for their work as cooperating teachers” (p. 42). Using a closed-response survey instrument, the teachers indicated four key expectations they regarded as central to assisting beginning teachers in learning-to-teach: providing student-teachers with an orientation to the school, supporting and modelling instructional planning, conducting and sharing formative and summative evaluations, and involving the student-teachers in the life of the school (e.g. professional development and extra-curricular opportunities). Projecting beyond what cooperating teachers currently do, the cooperating teachers indicated the need “to play a more active role in the professional development of would-be teachers” (p. 48). Zimpher and Sherrill’s (1996) study concurred with these results, and noted that cooperating teachers felt overall “that they [were] well prepared for their work with student-teachers” (p. 292). Other studies continue to show that cooperating teachers appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the profession through their work with student-teachers (Korinek, 1989; Zimpher & Sherrill, 1996) in part because of reciprocal professional development benefits that occur. Book (1996) notes that “supervisors have begun to realize that their role in supervising student-teachers has enabled them to learn more about teaching [because] in helping novices im-
prove, they articulate more explicitly what they know and believe about teaching” (p. 202). Other researchers, such as Neufeld and Freeman (1993), suggests similar outcomes.

However, what is largely missing is a deeper analysis of the work of cooperating teachers that moves beyond what is revealed in the brief surveys, interviews, observations, or self-reports—an analysis that shows the diverse and professionally rich ways hinted at but not documented by the studies noted above. In particular, we know little about how cooperating teachers frame and reframe their advisory practices; that is, how they reflect on their work with student-teachers. The goal of this study, therefore, is to document and analyze cooperating teacher reflection in practicum settings.

3. Method

This study is part of a multi-phase project exploring the advisory practices of cooperating-teachers. In Phase One, a survey was used to construct a profile of cooperating teachers who supervised 1250 elementary, middle school, and secondary student-teachers from our institution in 2000–2001 (Clarke, 2003). The survey was sent to 1328 teachers (N.B.: Some secondary student-teachers had two cooperating teachers). The survey was completed by 778 teachers (61% return rate). Attached to the survey was an invitation to participate in a second phase, specifically, an in-depth analysis of the cooperating teachers’ advisory practices using a modified stimulated-recall approach. It was anticipated that perhaps 20 or 30 teachers might volunteer for Phase Two. In a surprising response, 254 teachers (or one fifth of the entire 2000–2001 cohort) indicated a desire to participate in an in-depth analysis of their advisory practices. However, due to the resource-intensive nature of the data collection required for Phase Two, we were limited to working with six cooperating teachers.

The in-depth study focussed on the most predominant feature of an advisory relationship: a lesson taught by a student-teacher and the associated pre- and post-lesson conferences. Each of these elements was videotaped. Immediately after the taping of each element, a stimulated-recall session with the cooperating teacher was conducted (using the entire tape of each element as stimuli). During the recall sessions the participants were given the remote-control device for the playback machine and stopped, commented upon, and restarted the video tapes as they saw fit. In this way, the agenda for these sessions was set by the participants and not by the researcher. The recall sessions were also taped. A lesson, the associated pre- and post-lesson conferences, and the stimulated-recall sessions constituted one data-collection cycle (i.e. 6 taped sessions per cycle). The data collection target for the study was four to five cycles for each cooperating teacher during the course of a 13-week student-teacher practicum. All teachers were invited to participate in a "wrap-up" interview if they felt there were additional issues they wanted to address; two teachers availed themselves of this opportunity.

The criteria for selecting the participants for Phase Two included voluntary participation, school locations that were within a reasonable commuting distance of the research team (3 graduate students and myself), and school building layouts that permitted ease of movement and safe storage of the recording and playback equipment required for the study. The research team worked through the list of 256 teachers until 10 sites were identified that best fit the criteria: 6 as initial contact sites and 4 as back-up sites. One teacher withdrew from the study a week prior to data collection as he was called upon to fill a Vice-Principal vacancy. The study was expanded to include the first back-up site. Unfortunately, the student-teacher at this site withdrew after the third week of the practicum. At that point, it was difficult to establish another relationship with a cooperating teacher and his or her student-teacher and still meet the data collection targets outlined above, so it was decided to complete the study with five rather than six cooperating teachers.

As the study sought to understand how cooperating teachers made sense of their work with student-teachers, the analysis of the data demanded a rendering of cooperating teacher advisory practices that went beyond surface descriptions or one-off commentaries. Therefore, the work of Schön (1983, 1987), and his definition of reflective practice—employed frequently in education to analyze how people learn about and engage in a professional practice—was used (Pakman, 2000). Schön argues that an appreciation of professional practice is best gained by documenting how professionals frame and reframe their practice. For Schön, skilled practitioners learn to conduct frame experiments in which they impose a kind of coherence on ‘messy’ situations. They come to new understandings of
situations and new possibilities through a spiraling process of framing and reframing. Therefore, identifying how the cooperating teachers framed and reframed aspects of their advisory practice was central to this in-depth understanding of their work with student-teachers.

4. Results

At the outset, it should be noted that focussing on reflection emphasizes reactions such as surprise, confusion, intrigue, etc., all of which potentially trigger framing and reframing of one’s practice. Therefore, to the uninformed, it may appear that the cooperating teachers in this study were constantly uncertain, anxious, or insecure about their advisory practices. This was certainly not the case and, if space permitted, a full accounting of their work would highlight the teachers’ wide-ranging talents and abilities as advisors.

The research team was able to complete five full cycles for one cooperating teacher and four cycles for the four remaining cooperating teachers. The tapes from all cycles were transcribed verbatim. There were many issues raised by the cooperating teachers that were potential themes. However, only those issues for which a frame and reframe could be identified were regarded as reflective themes. Twenty-eight reflective themes were identified. General information about the participants and the number of themes for each cooperating teacher are provided in Table 1 (Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper).

Of the five student-teachers involved in the study, Gloria and Lorrie’s student teachers were very successful from the outset of the practicum and received a ‘Pass.’ The remaining three students found their practicum somewhat challenging. Sandra and Susan’s student teachers, after overcoming some difficulties in the first few weeks of their practicum, finally received a ‘Pass.’ However, Garry’s student teacher failed her practicum. She subsequently completed a 6-week supplemental practicum in a different school in the following year and received a ‘Pass.’

4.1. Reflective theme example

To illustrate the analysis process (e.g. the identification of a frame and a reframe), a brief example of a reflective theme (G–E Theme #1) from the study is provided below.

4.1.1. Reflection on active listening in a professional development context

Garry based his feedback conferences with his student-teacher on the concept of active listening; a concept which he had first discovered in his earlier volunteer work in counselling, therapy, and mediation. He later drew similarities between this approach and the non-directive approach to ‘supervision’ of student-teachers that he encountered in a ‘Supervision of Teaching’ course. For Garry, active listening meant holding in abeyance one’s thoughts and ideas about the issues under discussion. He was impressed by his ability to hold back and not intervene in his early interactions with Elaine:

This really intrigues me. Some of the things she says, just her reasons behind things. It still baffles me. So, I am surprised at myself that I can kind of hold back and then wait... without intervening (C1 Post-Conf Stim Recall p.6).

He reasoned that by not intervening, he was allowing Elaine to develop her own teaching style: “I don’t want to be directing her on what to do because then she ends up having to try and teach my lesson” (C1 Pre-Conf Stim p.8). Again in the second cycle, he was pleased with the tight rein that he kept on his desire to interject:

This really intrigues me. Some of the things she says, just her reasons behind things. It still baffles me. So, I am surprised at myself that I can kind of hold back and then wait... without intervening (C1 Post-Conf Stim Recall p.6).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cooperating teacher</th>
<th>Student-teacher</th>
<th>Transcript identifier</th>
<th>School level (and specialization)</th>
<th>Previous advisory experience</th>
<th>Reflective themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gloria</td>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>G–C</td>
<td>Elementary (Grade 2)</td>
<td>3 Student-teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garry</td>
<td>Elaine</td>
<td>G–E</td>
<td>Elementary (Grade 3/4)</td>
<td>2 Student-teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorrie</td>
<td>Matt</td>
<td>L–M</td>
<td>Elementary (Grade 6/7)</td>
<td>1 Student-teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>S–A</td>
<td>High (Home Economics)</td>
<td>6 Student-teachers</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>S–C</td>
<td>High (Physics)</td>
<td>8 Student-teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
So, I just sat on that and I never brought it up. I am kind of proud of myself. I really wanted to talk more about the author’s writing style [the focus of the lesson] and I never did. In the back of my mind I was wondering if the moment would arise during the discussion or if she would ask the question. ...It didn’t come up and I never did interject (C2 Pre-Conf Stim Recall p.13).

However, as Garry observed video tapes of his pre- and post-lesson conferences in which he used this approach, he was curious by the way he seemed to fade into the background during his interactions with Elaine; a situation which was in stark contrast to his interactions in other instructional contexts, for example, with the children in his classroom. As he thought more about his active listening approach he framed it in terms of the way in which it masked his personality during his conversations with Elaine.

I think I’m in the style...the active listening role. I have had training with active listening when I was a volunteer at different organizations . . . You know your personality is not there. It’s interesting. It’s helpful to watch this. As much personality as I put into the classroom [pause], and then I watch something like this and there’s no personality in this for me. It’s very strange. So, I have to think about what I am doing (C2 Pre-Conf Stim Recall p. 30).

However, his discussion about personality highlighted a deeper issue, an absence of voice, that confronted him as he continued to view the videotapes. He felt that his ‘lack of personality’ conveyed a neutral stance towards the pedagogical issues under discussion: “I’ve struggled with this issue, I don’t feel that I am all that positive. I’m neutral” (C2 Pre-Conf Stim Recall, p.24). He then reframed the problem with his use of active listening not just in terms of it masking his personality but in terms of the absence of judgements about practice that his implementation of this feedback approach precipitated.

You’re supposed to do all of this active listening. Well, when you do a non-directive approach or an active listening approach, somewhere you have got to kind of talk it out in a sense because, especially in my mind, teachers tend to be judgmental. ...We’re judging! (Wrap-Up interview, 35).

As he pondered this anomaly, the holding in abeyance one’s ideas, thoughts, and judgements, particularly in the professional development context of the practicum, his use of active listening seemed to have its limitations. Thus, he reasoned that there was a need for making and sharing judgements about practice. Therefore, Garry’s reflection on active listening in professional development context, first framed in terms of constraining his personality and later reframed in terms of constraining judgements about practice that he should share with Elaine, constituted an important turning point in thinking more deeply about the feedback process he used with his student-teacher.

4.2. The substance of cooperating teacher reflection

The 28 reflective themes were grouped into two broad categories (and a number of sub-categories):

- the cooperating teachers’ reflections on the sense they made of their own advisory practices (7 sub-categories representing 22 themes), and
- the cooperating teachers’ reflections on the sense they made of their student-teachers’ teaching practices (3 sub-categories representing 6 themes).

A summary of the categories, sub-categories, and reflective themes is provided in Table 2.

The sub-categories best capture the cooperating teachers’ reflections, as they provide a general summary of the cooperating teachers’ learning that occurred as a result of framing and reframing issues during the practicum. Only sub-categories with two or more themes are discussed in detail below. This is not meant to trivialize single-theme sub-categories. However, given space limitations for sharing the results, this report focuses on those categories that were evident in at least two of the five cooperating teachers’ in-depth studies.

4.2.1. Cooperating teachers’ reflections on their advisory practices

Reframing the feedback process (11 themes): All five cooperating teachers reflected on the ways in which they gave feedback to their student-teachers. Reflection on feedback ran the full gamut of possibilities from cooperating teachers simply needing to be more explicit to cooperating teachers needing to model ‘teacher thinking’ when giving feedback to their student-teachers. For example, in
Table 2
Reflective Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflective theme categories, sub-categories, and frames/reframes</th>
<th>Identifiers</th>
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</thead>
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**Category #1: Cooperating Teachers’ Reflections on Their Advisory Practices**

**Sub-category #1: Reframing the feedback process (11 Themes)**

- From worrying that the feedback given was too brief to recognizing that the brevity was governed by the desire to be authentic—“it is difficult to be effusive when there is little to be effusive about”
  - G–E #4
- From worrying that early dominance in conversations with the student curtailed the student-teacher’s interaction to recognizing that early conversations require significant advisor input to provide scaffolding so the student-teacher can begin to construct his own practice
  - L–M #1
- From viewing herself as being excessively directive to recognizing that her close monitoring of the student teacher’s teaching practice came from her strong sense of responsibility for pupil learning
  - G–C #3
- From believing that active listening was paramount in allowing a student-teacher to develop her practice to recognizing that failure to express judgments about that emerging practice is more detrimental than helpful
  - G–E #1
- From seeing feedback as information exchange—tell me the things that you noticed about your lesson and then I will tell you the things I noticed—to seeing it as a critical time for modeling teacher thinking
  - L–M #3 S–A #5
- From regarding the cooperating teacher’s role as teaching ‘a curriculum’ (as one might as a teacher in schools) to regarding it as mentoring a disposition for inquiry and reflection
  - G–C #6
- From being disappointed by the student-teacher’s lack of initiative to recognizing that her extensive support of the student-teacher bound the student-teacher to her ideas instead of letting her student generate her own ideas
  - S–A #7
- From believing that supportive feedback means providing a full and detailed response to all the student-teacher’s concerns to recognizing that excessive detail overwhelms rather than focuses the student-teacher on the key things she needs to work on for the next lesson
  - G–C #2
- From wondering why the student-teacher seemed to dismiss some aspects of the feedback to recognizing that there is a special language that experienced teachers use that is not always readily understood by student-teachers
  - G–C #5 S–C #2

**Sub-Category #2: Reframing good teaching practice (3 themes)**

- From realizing that it was not so much preparation that was the challenge for the student-teacher but the student-teacher’s inability to anticipate the broad range of responses from the pupils that a lesson might generate
  - S–C #1 L–M #4
- From realizing that her (the advisor’s) criteria for good teaching practice was based on an implicit sense of what she frequently used and was comfortable with (her “biases”) rather than regular scrutiny of established practices to determine if they were fulfilling the changing needs of the pupils
  - G–C #1

**Sub-Category #3: Reframing the sense of ‘student-teacher presence’ (3 themes)**

- From worrying about the student-teacher’s failure to ‘take charge’ to realizing that the inability for the student-teacher to develop a sense of ‘teacher presence’ in the classroom was directly related to the advisor’s difficulty in ‘letting go’ of the classroom
  - L–M #2
- From introducing the student-teacher as a full-fledged teacher to the pupils to recognizing that it would be better to introduce her for what she is—as a beginning teacher who is visiting the classroom to learn more about teaching—so that pupil expectations match the evolution of the student-teacher’s practice
  - G–E #2
- Where the advisor realized that her constant presence in the classroom was not related to her concern for pupil learning but the guilt trip the student-teacher “laid on her” if she was absent, by implying that she was “slacking off” and letting the student-teacher do all the work in the classroom
  - S–A #4

**Sub-Category #4: Reframing a disconnect between student-teacher and advisor (2 themes)**

- From regarding problems in communication between student-teacher and the advisor as a difference in teaching styles to recognizing it as a disconnect based on different cultural backgrounds
  - S–C #4 G–E #5

**Sub-Category #5: Reframing the lesson planning process (1 theme)**

- From realizing that her idea of a lesson plan as being a relatively straightforward task (a “simple one-pager”) to recognizing the complexity of that task for beginning teachers
  - S–A #2

**Sub-Category #6: Reframing notions of knowledge for teaching (1 theme)**

- From believing that a lack of general content knowledge was responsible for dull and boring lessons to recognizing that it was a lack of local knowledge that was the cause (i.e., a sense of local connectedness for the children)
  - S–A #3

**Sub-Category #7: Reframing the concept of risk undertaken by advisors (1 theme)**

- Where the risk associated with taking on a student-teacher is not so much in allowing them to take over your classroom as it is in allowing another person to study your teaching
  - G–C #4
In one instance, the cooperating teacher thought that her student-teacher was deliberately ignoring her advice only to later reframe this in terms of the student-teacher being unable to distinguish the key points that she should incorporate into her practice from those points that were of a more general nature and not requiring immediate action. As a result the cooperating teacher realized the necessity for being very explicit when giving feedback and to clearly specify two or three things that her student-teacher should focus on in the coming lesson.

Reframing the feedback process highlighted an important pedagogical dimension of advisory practice that differentiates this practice in significant ways from a cooperating teacher’s daily classroom teaching practice. Although feedback is an important part of classroom teaching, its prominence as one of the most central, if not the central, element of advisory practice did not appear to be apparent to the teachers prior to this study (even for those who had worked with a number of student-teachers). Given the time and opportunity to think about their feedback strategies, all five cooperating teachers realized they were in need of professional development in this area. Further, this finding suggests that the oft-heard argument that “a teacher is a teacher,” frequently used to avoid distinguishing between those who should or should not be cooperating teachers, is wrong-headed (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1993); for the cooperating teachers in this study, the feedback process for their student-teachers’ practices was regarded as significantly different from the feedback process used in their daily classroom teaching practice.

Reframing conceptions of good teaching practice (3 themes): Three of the five cooperating teachers reflected upon their conceptions of good teaching practice. All three teachers found that their original conceptions of good teaching, which they used frequently during the practicum as a guide for their student-teachers, fell well short of their intended depictions. Indeed, upon closer inspection they found these conceptions were quite misleading. Two teachers found that they were regularly using the term “preparation” when in fact they meant “anticipation.” A third teacher realized that she was promoting a heavily routinized approach to teaching that excluded on-the-spot improvisation in response to pupil input, the latter being an element that she felt was a defining feature of good teaching practice. Therefore, in all three cases, the cooperating teachers’ reflection on good teaching practice underwent significant revision during the course of this study. This category reminds us of the importance of making explicit and reviewing the assumptions that underlie one’s practice, in this case, one’s advisory practice. Further, it begs the question as to whether the practicum, while an important context for problematizing conceptions of good teaching, is too late for the cooperating

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<th>Reflective theme categories, sub-categories, and frames/reframes</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Category #2: Cooperating teachers’ reflection on the sense they make of their student-teachers’ teaching practices</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Category #1: Reframing the student-teacher's academic approach (3 themes)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From regarding the student-teacher’s approach as being overly intellectual to seeing the approach as a failure to acknowledge student conceptions</td>
<td>S-C #5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From regarding the student-teacher’s approach to be overly intellectual to seeing the approach as a fear of intimacy with the pupils</td>
<td>G-E #3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From a focus on the student-teacher’s heavily academic approach to instruction to recognizing that the student had no other experience to draw on, particularly in terms of being actively involved in her own learning</td>
<td>S-A #6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Category #2: Reframing a disconnect between the student-teacher and pupils (2 themes)</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>From regarding the student-teacher as having difficulty in establishing relationships with her pupils to realizing that the student’s poor grasp of content knowledge overwhelmed all other aspects of her classroom practice</td>
<td>S-A #1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From regarding problems in communicating with pupils as being primarily pedagogical to recognizing them as being essentially cultural in origin</td>
<td>G-C #7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Category #3: Reframing the student-teacher’s work ethic (1 theme)</strong></td>
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<td>From regarding the student-teacher as being particularly tardy and disorganized as a beginning professional to recognizing the student’s reluctance (even resistance!) to let go of his strongly held ‘student’ identity</td>
<td>S-C #3</td>
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teachers to begin this process if they wish to make the most of the relatively short time that they have in which to introduce their student-teachers to the teaching profession. This is particularly true if, according to a previous study (Clarke, 1995) the outcomes associated with framing and reframing often take weeks, if not months, to be translated into action in the practice setting.

Reframing the student-teachers' attempts to establish a 'teacher presence' (3 themes): Three cooperating teachers reflected upon the concept of 'student-teacher presence' (i.e. the position of authority and respect teachers are able to establish within their classrooms). In all three cases, the cooperating teachers suggested that the student-teachers take a more active role in interacting with their pupils to help establish a sense of teacher 'presence' in their classrooms. However, in two instances it was the cooperating teacher's reluctance to leave the classroom that they finally recognized as hindering the student-teachers' attempts to establish their own teacher 'presence' in the classroom. In the third instance, it was the cooperating teacher's high expectations of the student-teacher's status as 'a teacher' that he had set in the minds of his pupils that thwarted the student-teacher's attempt to establish her teacher 'presence.' In all three cases, the cooperating teachers were surprised to discover that the difficulties their student-teachers encountered stemmed more from their own actions in the classroom than those of their student-teachers. So, while the cooperating teachers' concept of teacher 'presence' remained the same, the underlying causes for a student-teacher's failure to establish this sense of 'presence' underwent significant revision.

Enmeshed within the concept of teacher 'presence' was a sense of transfer, specifically, of the responsibility for the pupils and their work as it moved from the cooperating teacher to the student-teacher (e.g. for establishing co-operative groups, for taking responsibility for tests and assignments, and so on). Central to this particular concept is that 'presence' is not only something actively taken up by the student-teacher but also something is actively given over by the cooperating teacher. Therefore the cooperating teachers' reflections on student-teacher 'presence' emerged as a duality in which 'presence' is a dynamic concept involving both parties.

Reframing a disconnect between student-teacher and cooperating teacher (2 themes): Two advisors reflected upon the disconnect that arose between themselves and their student-teachers. This was initially framed as a difference in teaching styles between themselves and their student-teachers; in the first instance the cooperating teacher regarded the student-teacher as having an overly 'academic' approach, and in the second case, as the student-teacher having an excessively 'university' approach. Although the cooperating teachers encouraged their student-teachers to explore a range of alternative teaching approaches, the student-teachers seemed to ignore these entreaties and held fast to their lecture-based, teacher-centred practices. As the practicum progressed, and the cooperating teachers began to learn more about the backgrounds and lives of their student-teachers in contrast to their own experiences, they reframed the disconnect between themselves and their student-teachers not simply in terms of their different teaching styles but in terms of the very different biographies and backgrounds that each brought to teaching.

This outcome highlights the importance of cooperating teachers and student-teachers exploring together issues of biography and contexts that give shape to their work as educators. Further, it underscores the importance of the relationship between the cooperating teacher and student-teacher as something that needs to go beyond an exchange of relatively superficial information to a real commitment to understanding the personal beliefs and experiences upon which one's ideas are based. Unfortunately, the single-page 'Student-Teacher Introduction Sheet,' that many programs, including UBC, use to introduce their student-teachers to the cooperating teachers, while a small step in the right direction, is insufficient by itself to address the issue raised here. While a number of students and their advisors develop relationships conducive to sharing biographical and experiential issues that shape their conceptions and teaching and learning, the outcomes of this study suggest that deliberate scaffolding and support to enable this type of sharing needs to be a prominent part of the pre-practicum or introductory practicum experiences.

4.2.2. Cooperating teachers' reflections on the sense they made of their student-teachers' teaching practices

Reframing the student-teacher's choice of an 'academic' approach (3 themes): Similar in content to the final category discussed above, this category reveals three cooperating teachers' attempts to make sense of their student-teachers' preference
for teacher-centred approaches to teaching. They framed these approaches in terms of the student-teachers choosing an approach that was consistent with the students’ recent experiences as pupils themselves (i.e. in university classrooms). Despite the cooperating teachers’ support and encouragement to explore other approaches (which all three student-teachers did to some extent), the cooperating teachers were intrigued by the continual return to an ‘academic’ approach by their student-teachers. Over time, as this approach seemed to elicit little excitement or enthusiasm for learning from the pupils in the classroom, the cooperating teachers began to explore more fully why this was the teaching method of choice for their student-teachers. In all three instances, the cooperating teachers reframed their student-teachers’ choices not in terms of the student-teachers’ most recent university experiences but rather:

- in the first case, as a failure to recognize the potential of involving pupils in the construction of knowledge;
- in the second case, as a fear of intimacy associated with actually engaging pupils in one-on-one or group discussions; and
- in the third case, as the completely foreign nature that a pupil-centred learning environment presented for the student-teacher.

Consistent with an earlier theme, the cooperating teachers’ reflections on the student-teachers’ choice of teaching approach highlighted the need for all practicum participants to deliberately explore and share biographical and the contextual information that influence their teaching practice.

Reframing a disconnect between the student-teacher and the pupils (2 themes): This category represents two cooperating teachers’ reflections on the disconnect between their student-teacher and the pupils. The curiosity surrounding their student-teacher’s inability to make connections with pupils was framed by both cooperating teachers in terms of their student-teachers’ difficulties in establishing relationships with the pupils. However, both cooperating teachers found that suggestions to their student-teachers regarding pupil relationships did not significantly improve the student-teachers’ practices. Challenged by this incongruity, and after further exploration, the first cooperating teacher realized that the disconnect stemmed from her student-teacher’s poor grasp of content knowledge, such that the student-teacher was so overwhelmed by her own struggles with the material required for each lesson that she could attend to little else related to the lesson. The second cooperating teacher reframed the disconnect in terms of the student-teacher’s vastly different cultural understanding of schools and schooling: a challenge that presented her student-teacher with an almost insurmountable barrier in addressing the issue of pupil relationships. Therefore, in both cases, the disconnect between student-teacher and pupils was symptomatic of a deeper issue. This category reinforces the belief that issues around communication encountered during practicum serve as early warning signals—‘red flags’—of more significant issues related to a student-teacher’s practice.

4.2.3. A summary of the substance of cooperating teachers’ reflections

The substance of cooperating teacher reflection as identified in this study resembles in part what we know from previous surveys, interviews, observations, and self-report data. In particular, the frequently cited claim that working with a student-teacher prompts one to think more deeply about one’s own teaching practice was evident in this study, for example, the reflective themes that focussed on conceptions of good teaching practice (Book, 1996; Neufeld & Freeman, 1993).

However, in a significant addition to the literature, this study demonstrated that the single most common issue the cooperating teachers reflected upon was the feedback process. While this theme was not unexpected given that feedback plays an important role in practicum settings, the frequency with which this theme appeared among the cooperating teachers’ reflections and the range of issues it addressed highlighted an important distinction between the teachers’ advisory practices and their regular classroom teaching practices. Further, it focused attention on an important professional development imperative for classroom teachers who wish to be cooperating teachers.

The study also contributes to our understanding of the ‘social’ dimension within the practicum context, not only within the classroom but also between the student-teacher and cooperating teacher; in particular, the need for both to appreciate the biographies that shape each other’s conceptions of teaching and learning. Time is such a precious commodity in schools that taking ‘time out’ to get to know one another is often lost in the time press to
discuss lesson and unit planning, etc. However, this study provided clear evidence that a precursor to effective advising is the development of a social relationship between the student-teacher and cooperating teacher. While many teacher educators acknowledge this need within their teacher education programs (Montgomery, 2000; Moore, 1992), few, if any, actually validate it by allocating time for the practicum partners to get to know one another. As this study amply demonstrated, without addressing this social dimension, confusion, miscommunication, and misinterpretation in the practicum setting may occur and can hinder and frustrate the best efforts of both advisor and student teacher.

4.3. The nature of cooperating teacher reflection

An early assumption in the literature on reflective practice, and one that remains common in many articles on reflection today, is that reflection is incidental in nature. That is, it is possible to document a practitioner reflecting on his or her practice in the course of a single conversation, interview, or stimulated-recall session (Borko, Livingston, McCaleb, & Mauro, 1988; MacKinnon & Erickson, 1988; Noordhoff & Kleinfeld, 1990). This assumption was challenged in a companion piece to this paper which examined student-teacher reflection (Clarke, 1995). It was found that student-teacher reflection was born of incidents but thematic in nature. That is, there is a substantive temporal nature to reflection in which the elements (framing and reframing) emerge over time.

A tentative hypothesis for a thematic rendering of student-teacher reflection rather than an incidental depiction previously reported in the literature was that most studies on reflection involved experienced practitioners who were able to frame and reframe issues on-the-spot (i.e. incidental) because of their advanced appreciative systems. It was suggested that student-teachers, however, lack the intellectual and practical experience that would enable them to frame and reframe teaching issues on-the-spot, therefore, their reflection was more likely to be thematic in nature (Clarke, 1998). This study provided the opportunity to test that hypothesis by using the same practicum context (a lesson taught by a student-teacher, the conferences surrounding that lesson, and the stimulated-recall process) and by documenting cooperating teachers’ reflections. A reflective theme map depicting the time frame for cooperating teacher reflection is presented alongside the theme map for student-teacher reflection reported in the companion study (Clarke, 1995) (see Fig. 1).

Unlike the student-teacher reflective theme map where there were no instances of framing and reframing within a single session or cycle, there were three occasions where the cooperating teachers were able to frame and reframe elements of their practice within a single session (G–C #6, G–E #2, S–C #2) and four occasions where they were able to reflect upon issues within a single cycle (G–C #4, G–C #5, G–E #4, S–A #7). This represents 25% of the cooperating teachers’ reflective themes documented in this study. However, 75% of all cooperating teacher themes documented in this study were temporal rather than episodic in nature. Further, it is interesting to note that the cooperating teachers tended to be more reflective than student-teachers in the same context (on average 5 themes for the teachers and 3 for the students).

4.3.1. A Summary of the nature of cooperating teachers’ reflections

To the best of my knowledge, this study is the first that has provided data on reflection that allows a direct comparison between beginning and experienced teachers. While it is difficult to generalize from small, in-depth studies of this type, the nature of the cooperating teachers’ reflections documented in this study supports the claim that the practicum provides a rich reciprocal professional development environment for the cooperating teacher (Book, 1996; Neufeld & Freeman, 1993), and also the contention that their reflection is more likely to be thematic in nature.

5. Conclusion

This study represents one of the first attempts to systematically explore the nature and substance of cooperating teacher reflection in practicum settings. One purpose of the study was to move beyond brief observations, surveys, interviews, and self-report data on cooperating teachers to a more in-depth exploration, from their perspective, of the nature and substance of cooperating teachers’ work with beginning teachers. The results indicate that the interaction between the cooperating teachers and their student-teachers promoted cooperating teacher reflection. Further, that reflection typically fell into two main categories: reflection on one’s advisory practices or reflection on the sense they
made of the student-teachers’ teaching practices. Both categories are significant in that they enabled the cooperating teachers to bring new perspectives to bear on their work as school-based teacher educators. The small number of reflective themes per teacher identified in this study (approximately 5 per cooperating teacher) indicates that reflection did not occur as readily as one might expect and/or it is difficult to identify when it does occur. Further, the temporal dimension stood in contrast to many episodic renderings of reflective practice in the literature. Therefore, the study supports the contention that reflection is often born of incidents but is thematic in nature.

While the learning documented in this study is drawn from a self-selected population and may reflect a group of teachers who were already predisposed to thinking about and reflecting upon their advisory practices, it nonetheless provides some broad parameters for understanding the sense that cooperating teachers make of their work with student-teachers. Also, the research method itself (e.g. the stimulated-recall sessions) provided increased opportunities for reflection that might not otherwise exist in regular practicum settings. However, the study identified more clearly the nature and substance of cooperating teacher reflection than previously captured in the literature.

The challenge now is to draw upon the nature and substance of the reflective themes outlined above in developing responsive and needs-based professional development programs for cooperating teachers. As student-teachers regard their work with cooperating teachers as the single most important feature of their teacher education program (Knowles & Cole, 1996) it is incumbent upon the profession to not only support cooperating teachers in this important work but also to know how this work interacts with and informs their advisory practices. The reframing evident in this study stands as a measure of cooperating teacher learning and one that needs to be supported as classroom teachers take on the role of school-based teacher educators.
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Further reading
