10-1-2008

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Findings

Principals as Mentors in Teacher Education: How Preservice Teachers' Voices Informed Practice

Issues: Fall 2008 - Volume 6 Issue 4
Posted On 2010-09-08 09:34:10
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Introduction

Principals in today's schools clearly have their work cut out for them. The job has never been easy and the addition of accountability for state standards and assessments just adds to the load. The implications of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) for principals involve spending significant amounts of time on the development of effective classroom teachers. The content of induction programs for new teachers now includes federal and state requirements for licensing and recertification (Highly Qualified Teachers) in addition to aligning new teacher needs with school mission and goals. As a result, the principal's role with beginning teachers has never been more important than in today's era of school reform. What impact do accountability measures have on the attrition and retention of new teachers? According to Hoerr (2005), 25 percent of new teachers will leave the profession within four years. Will that figure be further impacted by the fact that new teachers must deal with strict accountability issues along with the traditional concerns of classroom management, planning and organizing instruction, motivating and evaluating students, and using effective teaching strategies (Gordon & Maxey, 2000)? Federal and state requirements put added pressure on principals to get their teachers up to speed quickly in order to improve and sustain student achievement. While principals can put new teachers on the right course through well-developed induction programs, they may want to become involved sooner. It may prove advantageous to schools and the profession, if principals start looking at earlier involvement with new teachers during pre-service. Principals may argue that the extra time invested with preservice teachers may not impact their particular school when most students will take jobs in other districts. Considering the statistics on new teacher attrition and the prediction that we will need to educate 54.3 million students by 2008 in our nation's classrooms (Glatthorn, Jones & Bullock, 2006), principals may be providing a service that could impact the profession of teaching as a whole.

In light of the potential for miseducation during teacher education field experiences, one major area yet to be investigated is the nature of support for preservice teachers (Gold, 1996). While this support traditionally comes from peers, university faculty, and cooperating teachers, this study is interested in the support provided by PreK-12 building administrators. The link between a preservice teacher’s perceptions and learning during field work and the administrator’s role is relatively unstudied at this time. The following questions guided the study:

- What differences exist between the perceptions of principals and actual practice as reported by preservice teachers?
How does such interaction or the lack there of, impact the preservice teacher?

The Literature

The resulting impact on both the quantity and quality of new educators entering the profession of teaching is a growing concern (Rebore, 2007; Seyfarth, 2005). This study seeks to begin the dialogue on how teacher preparation can make a positive connection with these issues through a collaborative model for teacher education which includes not only the traditional triad of student teacher, cooperating teacher and university supervisor, but introduces a defining role for the building principal. The literature begins by exploring traditional teacher preparation in terms of setting the framework for contributions and focus provided by the aforementioned participants. The literature then delves into additional impacting issues for preservice teachers such as contextual factors associated with socialization into the school and the teaching profession, school culture, and climate. These topics represent a theoretical framework for focus and roles of the principal during teacher education.

Traditional Teacher Preparation

Early clinical field experiences. Early field (clinical) experiences and the student teaching experience are often regarded as two of the most significant aspects of teacher preparation programs (Bell & Robinson, 2004; Weasmer & Woods, 2003). Both the clinical field experience and student teaching are meant to provide the teacher candidate with authentic classroom experiences, practical knowledge and to help the teacher candidate develop a context for understanding and facilitating the complex relationship between learning and teaching.

Often occurring concurrently with university classes, clinical field experiences offer considerable opportunities for teacher candidates to learn and acclimate themselves to their chosen profession while building discrete pedagogical skills, dispositions, and classroom expertise. Typical opportunities and areas of growth for teacher candidates during field experiences include planning lessons and units, improving classroom management techniques, differentiating and assessing their instruction to meet the individual learning needs of their students.

Field experiences are used to engage and build teacher candidates knowledge, understanding and accelerate their growth toward expert pedagogy (McDermott, Gormley, Rothenberg & Hammer, 1995). A group of teacher candidates are placed in a K-12 school (clinical environment) and experience the total ecology of classroom teaching while working with pupils within their intended area of licensure. The clinical field experience contributes considerably to the professional learning and development of teacher candidates and its effect is to underscore the scope and complexities of working in an authentic learning environment (Graham, 2006). Learning to teach is a multi-faceted process determined by the interaction of personal factors, such as the teacher candidate’s knowledge and beliefs about teaching, learning, and subject matter; and situational factors such as expectations, demands, and feedback from key actors in the university and public school settings (Borko & Mayfield, 1995). In the field placement, teacher candidates generally work under the guidance of a university faculty member and cooperating teacher who share their expertise and work to support the intern.

The experience of learning to teach under the supervision of skilled, educational professionals can increase professional teaching behaviors and promote habits of mind not easily acquired in campus-based methods coursework (McDermott, Gormley, Rothenberg & Hammer, 1995). One of these
professionals with whom the student teacher needs to associate is the building principal who can provide a perspective much broader than the confines of the classroom. However, the teacher candidates regularly report minimal interaction with the principal during their clinical field experiences (Liebert, 1992; Vann, 1988).

Student teaching. Student teaching is the final developmental stage for a teacher candidate in which to accomplish three primary tasks: (1) acquire knowledge of students, (2) use that knowledge to modify and construct their personal identity as a teacher, and (3) develop standard procedural routines that integrate classroom management and effective instruction (Kagan, 1992).

Student teaching is the capstone event for a teacher candidate enrolled in a teacher education program. As student teachers gain more classroom experience, they move from initial concerns about self and basic teaching competencies to more sophisticated concerns about their students’ learning (McDermott, Gormley, Rothenberg & Hammer, 1995). In student teaching, it is the authentic integration of theory and practice that is the primary tool which facilitates teacher candidates becoming reflective practitioners who can develop a strong rationale for instructional decisions (Moore, 2003). As with most outcomes in education, a successful student teaching experience is built through intensive collaboration. This collaborative effort is interdependent on several factors, including a teacher candidate committed to growing and learning, a cooperating teacher willing to share his/her knowledge, and placement in a PreK-12 school which welcomes educational interns and student teachers.

In theory, the selection and placement for student teaching are generally selective; student teachers, cooperating teachers and building principals participate in an interview process (Liebert, 1992). However, the formality, consistency, and inclusion of each of these important contributors tend to vary from school to school. The risks can and should be lessened if the university and clinical site have a strong communication link and are philosophically united.

Many teachers have identified student teaching as the most important element in their preparation (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust & Shulman, 2005). Student teaching experiences have been linked to efficacy and teacher attrition rates (Plourde, 2002) and one recent survey of early-career teachers (Oh, Ankers, Llamas & Tomyoy, 2005) reported their first year teaching as a disappointment and not what they expected after successful student teaching. It should be noted student teaching can also socialize teacher candidates into existing school cultures and patterns which may not represent effective practice (Conderman, Morin & Stephens, 2005). Likewise, placement with teachers who take instructional shortcuts or who are simply ineffective also can have a deleterious effect on teacher candidates’ professional development.

Traditionally, the role of the cooperating teacher is so complex because he/she is responsible for both evaluation of the teacher candidate as well as mentoring (Weasmer & Woods, 2003). Effective cooperating teachers carefully guide the teacher candidate toward an authentic classroom experience. A survey of cooperating teachers perceived their role and responsibilities as including modeling, mentoring and guiding teacher candidates (Anderson & Shannon, 1988). While the university supervisor has similar mentoring and evaluation responsibilities as the cooperating teacher, and is generally regarded as a liaison between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher assuring a quality clinical experience, “cooperating teachers do all the heavy lifting in preparing new teachers” (Power & Perry, 2002; p. 408). The “triad” of cooperating teacher, university supervisor and student
teacher is meant to be a close, mutually beneficial relationship but if role expectations, responsibilities or philosophies are unclear, the triad can fail and interfere with the teacher candidate’s induction into teaching (Bullough & Draper, 2004). Student teachers can successfully navigate this important stage in their career with the help of cooperating teachers, university supervisors and the principal (Bell & Robinson, 2004; Vann, 1988).

The Principal’s Role with Socialization into the School and the Profession of Teaching

Teaching is a complex profession that places many demands on the novice teacher, often overwhelming and frustrating these new professionals (McCaughtry, Cothran, Kulinna, Martin & Faust, 2005). The novice teachers enter the profession eager, excited and ready to make changes in schools (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). However, they are not always prepared for the challenges of teaching.

The challenges for novice teachers include: planning and motivating students, understanding and implementing a curriculum already in place, developing a rapport with students, parents, colleagues and administrators, and learning to navigate the organizational structure (Kent, 2000). Additionally the novice must learn how to negotiate the introduction of new ideas and practices learned during teacher education preparation (McCaughtry, et. al., 2005). Interviews with novice teachers revealed that they often worked in isolation, were faced with multiple academic preparations, or were left to “sink or swim” without any organized support from colleagues or administrators (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; McCaughtry, et. al., 2005). Novice teachers seek to be accepted and achieve competency while trying to change or challenge the way things are done. Therefore, the social systems they face can be powerful.

Because this is a study on preservice teachers’ and principals’ perception of field experiences, our conceptual framework draws on how preservice teachers’ initial perceptions are formed within the context of the schools they encounter. The process of initial belief and attitude imprinting that takes place during field experiences of a new teacher has been neglected in the literature (Gold, 1996). Research exists on how preservice teachers process their experiences by interpreting their initial perceptions and impressions of teaching and the teaching environment (Clift & Brady, 2005; Gold, 1996). But just knowing what preservice teachers do in the field is insufficient; teacher educators need to know how candidates interpret and process their activities from the field into a rich, deep understanding of teaching (Applegate, 1985). It is the candidate’s interpretation of their first encounter with building administrators that is at the heart of this study, for how preservice teachers’ behaviors and perceptions are shaped by principals and vice principals is unknown (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990).

There is evidence in the literature to suggest that preservice teachers develop broad generalizations about education and teaching from field experiences (Armstrong, 1989-90; Rushton, 2000). But the question of what these generalizations actually are remains unanswered. By strict definition, imprinting occurs during a critical period when a preservice teacher enters a new environment or culture. This occurs in many ways during a teacher education program, for example: the first class taken, meeting a new cohort, initial interaction with the program’s faculty and staff, initial field experiences, and student teaching. During these critical periods, preservice teachers internalize the perceptions, beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes they encounter (Gold, 1996). There is evidence that the socialization process during imprinting occurs at the university level during teacher education programs; hence, teacher education does have some impact on the attitudes and actions of new teachers (Foote, Cook-Cottone,
But how well and for how long do these imprinted attitudes and actions stick? The teacher socialization process evolves as teachers incorporate new experiences and learning; the same holds true for preservice teachers in teacher education programs. In a review of empirical research on the process of teacher socialization throughout preservice and in-service phases in secondary schools, Staton and Hunt (1992) concluded that the imprinting preservice teachers bring into the settings of their new experiences influences their attitudes and actions. Therefore, through teacher-preparation experiences, including field experiences, preservice teachers continue to interact, thereby participating in the socialization process. Changes in a candidate’s socialization occur when their internally held beliefs (including newly imprinted attitudes and actions) interplay with the people in the context in which they are working (Gold, 1996). In the course of the field experience, preservice teachers may interact with their building’s principal. It is this interaction that can have a profound, long-term impact on new teachers from the perspective of imprinting.

Logically, imprinting can stamp a positive or negative attitude or behavior on a preservice teacher. When the majority of interactions with a peer, mentor teacher, or principal are disappointing, inappropriate, or overwhelming, negative feelings can grow intense to the point where previously learned attitudes and actions become blocked out (Clift & Brady, 2005; Foote, Cook-Cottone, 2004). How does this relate to the field experiences of preservice teachers? During critical periods in their career, teachers and preservice teachers form attachments to specific individuals and experiences within the context of their work settings (Gold, 1996). This is where the principal’s role in imprinting becomes vital.

The interaction, support, and leadership that principals provide new teachers are imperative for their well-being. Hence, relationships with principals could be more important for the imprinting of new teachers than previously thought. The leadership role the principal projects within the context of their educational community actually sets the stage for preservice teachers to respond in terms of their own interaction, expectations, and actions as teachers. If the principal’s projected role is aloof or destructive, their imprinting of a new teacher can negatively impact the long-term progression of that teacher’s career (Gold, 1996; Rushton, 2000).

School Culture and Climate

The process of imprinting acts within a school context; the culture and climate of this context may have a profound impact on the imprinting process. Understanding the culture and climate of a school depends on interpreting how societal issues impact the organization and the behavior of its members. Loosely defined, culture pertains to what the people in a particular school value. Shared values define the basic character of a school and give it a distinctive identity (Hoy & Hoy, 2006). A school’s culture provides a compass for its members because it defines an organization’s meaning and purpose. Inferences about a school’s climate can be made by looking at the behavior of its staff and students. In addition to influencing member behavior, a school’s climate embodies a set of internal characteristics that is very contextual and distinguishing (Hoy, 1990).

For preservice as well as new and experienced teachers, understanding the culture and climate of their new school can be daunting. Their perceptions of teaching are shaped by a variety of factors related to their work location, including the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of the people who work there, as well as the community’s expectations (Bartell, 2005). The influence of the school’s culture and climate can be a strong factor for shaping the beliefs and practices of new teachers. Sometimes, those cultural
beliefs and practices are in conflict with what is learned in their teacher preparation programs. The principal can perform a helpful role by providing preservice teachers with an explanation of how behaviors observed in their building reflect the core values of the organization. Such an orientation additionally assists in bridging the gap between the philosophical perspectives of the teacher preparation program and the school (Nolan & Hoover, 2004). According to Sergiovanni (2001), the principal is in a key position to communicate the collective ideology and can answer questions about what makes a school unique, including what members value and why they function in a certain way. By providing such insight, preservice teachers can gain a better understanding of their own role and purpose within the organization.

Sarason (1990) maintains that unless schools become places where teachers can grow and develop, they will not be able to create optimal learning conditions for students to grow and develop. Since the overall organizational culture and climate influences the work of individuals, leaders at the building level have the critical responsibility for providing initial and ongoing support to all teachers, beginning with those at the preservice level.

Integrating the principal into the triad of student teacher, cooperating teacher, university supervisor reinforces the collaborative nature of teacher preparation and ensures that work of the group is geared toward the common goal of supporting the teacher candidate in the classroom, the school, and the profession.

The Study

This study sought to gather data in order to examine the perceptions of current principals regarding role expectations and involvement during pre-service activities. This information was then compared with actual experiences of preservice teachers with building principals. The information gained from the preservice teacher’s perspective adds a missing element to teacher education and administrative preparation programs and facilitates the development of a new four-way multi-dimensional collaborative model that includes the teacher candidate, cooperating teacher, university supervisor, and building principal. The nomothetic survey method, which emphasizes the quantitative analysis of a few variables across a larger sample, was chosen to gather primary data from principals and pre-service teachers (Larsson, 1993). During the first phase of the study, surveys were mailed to 25 middle and high school principals. The main criteria for selecting principal participants were representation from PreK-12 schools that accommodated teacher candidates for early field and student teaching experiences. 18 surveys were completed. Information was additionally gathered from 63/103 students who participated in field experiences from fall 2003 through fall 2004.

An interpretive qualitative research approach was additionally employed (Cresswell, 1994; Erickson, 1986; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Use of this research method provides opportunities for specific understanding through the documentation of interviews, statements and details from local practice; considers the meaning behaviors, knowledge, beliefs and events have for participants; and offers comparative understanding between and beyond the immediate circumstances of the local setting (Erickson, 1986). The technique for gathering data employed in this investigation was the process of in-depth interviewing. Described as a “conversation with a purpose” (Kahn and Cannell, 1957), in-depth interviews are much more like conversations than formal events with predetermined
response categories. The researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant’s perspective, but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the response. Nine preservice teachers participated in interviews that were audio tape recorded and transcribed verbatim with dialog attributed to each speaker. The constant comparative method was used to determine major themes, patterns, and categories. These themes were then used as the framework for discussion.

The major research questions for this study were:

- What was the nature of student interaction with principals during field experience?
- What were some positive and/or negative interactions with the principal?
- How did students perceive the role of the principal during field experiences?
- What did students learn about the role of the principal during their teacher education program?

The primary researchers contacted each preservice teacher to explain the study, gauge interest, and arrange a meeting. Primary data collection occurred during the fall semester of 2004. To identify preservice teacher interaction with the principal during field experiences, the participants participated in interviews to identify and describe that involvement. The interviews for this study consisted of structured and open-ended questions which encouraged meaningful responses and facilitated opportunities to share experiences and allow areas of importance to emerge. The interviews were designed to elicit, investigate, and record the extent, quality, types of preservice teacher and principal interaction during the clinical experiences phase of teacher education. The dual structured/emergent factors of the interview were designed to (1) allow participants to disclose their knowledge and understanding about their beliefs and practices concerning their involvement with principals and (2) facilitate explanations for what extent they determined their involvement during field experiences.

The rigor and quality of an interpretive qualitative research project can be examined by the representation of four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish credibility (internal validity), whether the findings match what is really occurring, this proposed study used the five recommended strategies of triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and disclosure of researcher bias for qualitative research (Merriam, 1998).

This study attempted a measure of self-reporting through interviews. A conceptual limitation may be attributed to the interviews, which were used as significant tools for evaluation and information, but may not be completely accurate due to participants’ concerns about self-disclosure and confidentiality. Additionally, the data and information was filtered through the authors’ own personal perspectives as well as the conceptual framework which guides this study.

While practicing principals regarded interaction with preservice teachers as being quite important, survey findings showed their perceptions to be at odds with what students had reported during field experience. Student survey results verify comments made during interviews about their expectation and need for communication and interaction with the building’s primary administrator. Table 1 provides a summary of survey results of principals and preservice teachers.

<p>| Table 1. Survey results reflecting perceptions vs. practice of principals with pre-service teachers. |  |  |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Pre-service Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal:</td>
<td>%Important/Not</td>
<td>%Occurred/Did Not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets with University Supervisor.</td>
<td>44.4 55.5</td>
<td>28.6 71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcomes pre-service Teachers.</td>
<td>100 0</td>
<td>28.6 71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shares school mission</td>
<td>83.3 16.7</td>
<td>15.9 84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduces pre-service teacher to cooperating teacher.</td>
<td>94.5 5.6</td>
<td>14.3 85.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduces pre-service teacher to staff.</td>
<td>77.8 22.2</td>
<td>9.5 90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaints pre-service teacher with student population/demographics.</td>
<td>66.7 33.3</td>
<td>17.5 82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes periodic visits to classroom.</td>
<td>83.4 16.7</td>
<td>15.9 84.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observes a lesson and give feedback.</td>
<td>72.2 27.8</td>
<td>9.5 90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meets with cooperating teacher concerning pre-service activities.</td>
<td>77.8 22.2</td>
<td>20.6 79.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducts an exit interview.</td>
<td>72.2 27.8</td>
<td>14.3 85.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The student interviews further reinforced what students had previously communicated during their field experiences. Four major themes emerged from the survey and interview data of all participants: meeting the principal, expectations of the principal, role of the principal, and the effects of interaction. While these themes have all included the role and visibility of the principal, they seem to represent varying degrees of the preservice teacher’s beliefs about how principals should be performing their jobs.

**Meeting the Principal**

Preservice teachers seemed to feel that being welcomed by the principal (i.e., actually meeting him/her in the beginning of their field experience) is important. Unfortunately, according to the survey data, 71% of respondents did not meet the principal. Additionally, most who had met the principal said that the introductions were brief; they rarely had any real contact, and never had a full conversation. As one field student stated, “I’ve never met the principal in the three…I’ve been to either two or three field experiences and I’ve never been introduced to the principal or the vice principal.”

Because of the lack of contact, most preservice teachers indicated that they did not form a positive impression of the principal. In other instances, preservice students knew they were meeting an administrator, but didn’t know his/her administrative capacity or name. As one preservice candidate said, “I didn’t really react as well as I should have in meeting the principal. But then again, the principal didn’t do too much on her part to initiate conversation. She seemed totally disinterested in my existence, let alone my interests.”

Included in this welcome was meeting the preservice teacher and introducing him/her to their mentor teacher and other staff in the building. Only 39% of principals feel welcoming preservice teachers and introducing them is important. Therefore, in terms of meeting the principal, the mentor teachers, and the school staff, preservice teachers found this to be an integral part of the early field experience. Principals, however, placed less importance on this.

**Expectations of Principal**

The findings indicate that preservice teachers expect principals to be a visible presence in the building for them as well as for students. Preservice teachers seem to have the expectation that the principal will provide a brief background about the school and discuss his/her cultural understanding of that particular school setting. One candidate stated, “I would have liked to have the principal come, introduce themselves and get a feeling of what I expected and see, [and] maybe relate that to how their school is run. Maybe to tell what the school is about…to answer some questions about the school.” And still other candidates indicated that culturally they “expect that the administrator would work more comprehensively with everyone who has contact with the school to understand the culture of the school.”

While preservice candidates had this expectation, 84% of those candidates polled indicate that principals did not share the school mission. Clearly, the candidate’s expectations were not met even though 83% of principals noted that sharing the school mission was important or very important.

**Role of the Principal**

Preservice teachers seemed to have opinions about what role they expect the principal to play in their early field experiences. While this role was not large per se, the data seemed to indicate the
expectation of a definite presence within the school. Preservice teachers noted that the principal’s role is to create a positive learning environment, maintain good relationships with teachers, and be an overall presence in the day-to-day activities of the school. When interviewed, preservice teachers stated that they “think that it’s important that the administrators make their presence known to people who are going into the classroom” and that “they represent the school and…should be an outstretched arm of the school… that [they] have communication with [us].”

In terms of the survey data, those items concerned with sharing the school mission speak to the “presence” the preservice teachers are expecting. In analyzing the survey data from principals, 22% indicated sharing the school mission was very important for future teachers. In fact, 17% of principals placed this role as lower in importance. Again, the data indicated a gap in what the preservice teacher’s expect the principal’s role to be and what the current principals seemed to expect of their own role.

**Effects of Interaction with Principal**

For many preservice teachers, the effect of the little interaction they did have with the principals while in the field was both upsetting and motivating at the same time. Preservice candidates noted in interviews they have a need to see and feel the presence of the principal, and to have that feeling be a positive one. One teacher candidate stated that, “…not seeing them [principals] and not understanding what their role is in the school,” caused some upset. What the preservice candidates described as upsetting was that when they did see or have any interaction with the principal, many of those interactions were either negative or the principal seemed just too busy to communicate with the preservice teacher. One candidate remarked, “she [the principal] talked kind of negative about the student to the secretary that was there and it kind of…didn’t make me feel very comfortable to hear principals talking about students in a negative way…” Many preservice participants note the negative impression principals can create, from how they speak to others or their lack of communication altogether. One participant stated, “[I]t seemed like she [the principal] had better things to do than meet with us students…like…she was too busy to care that we were even there…”

While interview questions were aimed at gathering information on how preservice teachers’ interaction with principals affected their views on entering teaching, most respondents noted that they did not really know the principal’s role in the building because they never saw them. In addition, 90% of preservice teachers thought the principal should observe one lesson when he/she teaches during their field experience; 84% believe that the principal should make periodic classroom visits. Both of these actions, if done, would increase the visibility of the principal, thereby enhancing the potential for preservice teachers having a positive regard for the principal’s role.

In terms of periodic visits to the classroom and observing a lesson taught by the preservice teachers, only 55% of principals indicated it is important to visit the classroom, and only 28% found this to be a very important activity. In terms of observing a lesson, only 42% of principals found this activity important or very important.

Of the two populations, the importance of interaction between preservice teachers and principals was highest among the preservice teachers and lowest among principals. It is interesting that 28% of principals deemed observing a lesson taught by preservice teachers low in importance. This is in striking contrast to the data showing preservice teachers placed great importance on communication
and interaction with principals. In essence, principal candidates thought interaction with preservice teachers was quite important, but principals saw their role in early field experiences as less important. So, on the one hand the principal’s role in early field experiences was deemed important, but principals just were not fulfilling that role as seen in the data.

Implications

Preservice teachers want interaction with principals during field experiences. Principals report recognizing the importance of fulfilling that need. However, this study indicates a wide gap between the perceptions of the principal’s role with preservice teachers and their actual practice. This gap indicates a great omission by both teacher and leadership preparation programs – that there are generally no clear expectations regarding the principal’s role with preservice teachers. Fortunately, our university has listened to students’ voices and is taking steps to meet this need by promoting a collaborative model of teacher education that incorporates a more defined role for the principal. Varrati, LaVine, and Turner (2009) present a conceptual model of collaboration (Table 2) that goes beyond the traditional clinical experience supervision models comprised of the student teacher, university supervisor, and the cooperating teacher to incorporate the principal. In terms of focus, the university supervisor is primarily concerned with student teachers and how they are fulfilling the college program’s expectations. The cooperating teacher’s focus is primarily on how the student teachers are functioning in the classroom. However, the emerging trend is a movement toward mutual responsibility, including collaboration between faculty and administrators from the teacher education unit and members from the local school (Burrett & Slick, 1995). Accordingly, an additional area of focus should come from the school principal who would be concerned with how the student teachers become knowledgeable and function within the larger context of teaching from a school, community, and global perspective.

Table 2. Collaborative model roles in teacher preparation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Teacher</th>
<th>University Supervisor</th>
<th>Cooperating teacher</th>
<th>Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building knowledge of students and teaching, constructing personal identity as a teacher, and developing standard procedural routines for class management and effective instruction.</td>
<td>Ensuring teacher preparation program philosophy is met while creating balance and support for the preservice teacher, cooperating teacher, and building principal.</td>
<td>Supporting authentic practices through a variety of rich opportunities for preservice teacher to build a context for understanding and facilitating the complex relationship between teaching and learning.</td>
<td>Providing the connection between teacher preparation coursework and the educational context that includes how classroom practices interact with district/school mission and goals, the conditions and dynamics of a diverse community, and the global issues and forces affecting teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As of fall 2007, one implication of this study was that our college of education’s clinical experiences handbook was revised to address the principal by folding in expectations for some key responsibilities. In addition to welcoming teachers at the onset of the experience and meeting with them before they leave, the following activities are briefly discussed to provide a model for teacher preparation programs and principals to become more active in preservice clinical experiences.

University supervisor meets with principal. This activity is incorporated into the role of the university supervisor and ideally occurs before preservice teachers arrive and before the selection of a cooperating teacher. This activity kicks off the principal’s involvement because together they can identify the best match for each student and what key activities the principal will assume.

Principal meets with cooperating teacher. The principal is responsible for selecting the cooperating teacher but should not stop there. In a collaborative model, the principal and cooperating teacher would discuss the activities where the principal can be engaged, such as classroom visits and lesson observations. The preservice teacher, through these coordinated activities, begins to identify the active role that a principal fulfills as the school’s instructional leader.

Principal schedules and conducts topical meetings throughout the clinical experience. These meetings should address topics that apply a school and district context to what preservice teachers are doing in the classroom. Two such topics might include sharing the school mission and student population and demographics. Sharing the school mission provides the big picture of how classroom instruction relates to school and district goals. The principal stresses the importance of the school as a community of learners that includes staff, students, parents, university, and other stakeholders. The nature of this overview serves to instill the spirit of teaching as a collaborative endeavor and breaks the chain of isolation. Acquainting preservice teachers with student population and demographics can include various characteristics such as language, culture, and socio-economic status, which must be given serious consideration concerning issues pertaining to teaching and learning. Through the principal’s broad lens, the teacher can better understand the connection between the student population and school-wide instructional planning.

Principal makes periodic classroom visits. According to Blase and Blase (2004), principals who make unannounced classroom visits enhance teachers’ motivation, self esteem, sense of security, and morale. Effective principals also use such visits as another way to monitor instruction and provide helpful, critical feedback to teachers. Early exposure to this informal interaction between principals and teachers can lesson the anxiety new teachers feel about supervisor expectations.

Principal observes lesson and gives feedback. This helps the practicing teacher see lessons within the context of the school and district curriculum and instructional program that other supervisors don’t possess. This perspective is even more appropriate within today’s climate of school reform because what happens in a single classroom is no longer viewed in isolation.

In addition, the content of educational leadership programs sets no solid expectations for principal interaction with preservice teachers. Our university addresses this issue by including the collaborative model for clinical experiences through topics such as teacher supervision and induction. Developmental and differentiated supervision promotes the use of a variety of professional growth
activities from directive supervisory approaches to group processes (Glatthorn, 1997; Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2007; Nolan & Hoover, 2004). These supervisory models are designed so principals can give needed one-to-one attention to the most inexperienced and needy teachers, which could begin with preservice teachers in our schools. By including instruction that discusses how to take an active role in teachers’ early professional growth beginning with preservice, principals can learn to provide the early administrative support that our students say is important to new teachers.

Conclusion

A new model that includes an active role for the principal during field experiences has been discussed. This model can work if there is true collaboration between the cooperating teacher and university supervisor to solicit and include the principal as an active participant. Principal preparation programs need to collaborate with teacher education programs to address this aspect of supervision into course content and internships. Principals that work with universities that do not promote such a model can be the ones to initiate the collaboration by suggesting that they become more active by assuming some of these responsibilities.

If these preservice voices speak for this generation of teachers, they are sharing their desire to experience from the beginning leadership expectations that can positively impact a successful and productive career. This study has uncovered implications for future study. One area is to study teacher preparation programs more in depth to get further information about how principals are involved in teacher education. Implementation of this collaborative model in a pilot capacity during early field and student teaching experiences would provide a means to gather more data about collaboration, especially the role of the principal. Finally, a study should be done of professional development schools to see how the principal is involved in a supervisory and instructional leadership capacity with preservice teachers within those programs.

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Allyn & Bacon.


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