

Chapter 22

University Supervisors' and Mentor Teachers' Evaluations of Teaching Episodes

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ABSTRACT

Teacher candidates receive mentorship and evaluations from university supervisors and cooperating teachers, qualified educational professionals and stakeholders performing two different roles. The study examined to what extent university supervisors and cooperating teachers agreed and disagreed on effective teaching. University supervisors and cooperating teachers were asked to watch three videos of teaching episodes and rate them using a 20-question observation instrument. Follow-up focus groups were held to discuss reasons for the ratings. Results indicated that these groups generally agreed on many aspects of quality teaching, but substantive differences existed as well. Raters varied by role when rating facets of language development for language learners, instructional strategies and assessment. Differences in ratings between these groups were explained by the way they view their roles and responsibilities in the classroom as well as the way they interpreted the components of the observation instrument.

INTRODUCTION

The respective roles of university supervisors and cooperating teachers in the student teaching triad with student teachers are complex and informed by the contexts of members' roles and responsibilities in teacher preparation (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014; Tillema, 2009; Wolff, van den Bogert, Jarodzka, & Boshuizen, 2015). The primary role and responsibility of university supervisors is

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to mentor, supervise, and evaluate the student teachers in their charge to become effective teachers. As well, they have an obligation to espouse and promote the goals and missions of the university teacher education program. On the other hand, cooperating teachers answer first to their young charges as well as parents, the principal, and the larger community within and outside of the school. While they are concerned about the student teachers with whom they work, their main role is to help their students academically, socially and emotionally. Despite these differences in roles and responsibilities, university supervisors and cooperating teachers are a critical component of the sustained partnerships in teacher preparation and essential for reciprocal teaching, learning, and bridge-building from theory and research to practice.

Past research on stakeholder roles in supervision reveal not only variance in how classrooms are viewed by these individuals, but differences in the priorities and expectations of university supervisors and cooperating teachers who mentor preservice teachers (Slick, 1998; Thompson, Hagenah, Lohwasser, & Laxton, 2015; Veal & Rickard, 1998). For example, university supervisors may look for student teachers' application of what they have learned in methods classes, whereas cooperating teachers may look for instruction that is consistent with what they already do within the context of daily teaching. Additional research has further defined the diverse roles of various classroom observers in ways that reveal their individual stances on evaluating beginning teachers' competencies (Bullough & Draper, 2004; Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014; Feiman-Nemser, 2000, 2001; Tillema, 2009; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009; Wolff, van den Bogert, Jarodzka, & Boshuizen, 2015).

The current study furthers past work linked to student teaching triads by investigating the sources of agreement and variability between university supervisors and cooperating teachers. To this end, the research questions were: To what extent do university supervisors and cooperating teachers agree or disagree on quality ratings of teachers' lessons? More importantly, what are the sources of variability in their agreements and disagreements?

BACKGROUND

Teaching is complex and multifaceted. Students, teachers, curriculum, leadership, and assessment are among the many variables that contribute to the tapestry of teaching. These variables mediate what is taught in classrooms and how it is taught. Importantly, teaching is also mediated by school and community cultures as well as by the past histories of each.

Activity theory serves as a useful framework for understanding the complex relationships and interactions involved in schools and classrooms and the university supervisors, cooperating teachers, and student teachers who work in them (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009). Activity theory has its roots in the cultural and historical school of psychology (Vygotsky, 1978; Leont'ev, 1978), as well as constructs in anthropology and sociology, which foreground cultural and historical pasts in understanding current behavior (Engeström, 1993). It is the social context that is the unit of analysis in activity theory, a fact that makes it appropriate for analyzing and understanding pre-service teaching in classrooms (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999).

According to activity theory, systems such as classrooms are "dynamic, open, and semiotic" places where people make meaning (Lemke, 1990, pp. 191). In classrooms, teachers are involved in the meaning-making process, as are students. As well, actions by teachers and students contribute to the ongoing culture of the classroom (Cobb, Gresalfi, & Hodge, 2008; Gresalfi, Martin, Hand, & Greeno, 2009) and

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